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Edward Taylor: Toward Union With God; Studies in the Preparatory Meditations

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EDWARD TAYLOR: TOWARD UNION WITH GOD

Studies in the Preparatory Meditations

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Gary D. Swaim

Preface

It would be satisfying to think that my efforts in this work had contributed something of value, however small, to growing interests in Edward Taylor. The efforts are not mine alone, of course; many have aided in bringing me to this point in my academic career. For their introducing me in the middle 1960's to the seventeenth century, with all its richness, I wish to thank Professors Stanley Stewart, Milton Miller, and Thomas Kranidas (University of California at Riverside). I am deeply indebted as well to the members of my doctoral committee: Professors Fritz Bromberger, William Main, Gordon Atkins, and Ralph Hone of the University of Redlands; and Professor French Fogle of Claremont Graduate School. Each contributed scholarship, encouragement, and some sorely needed good humor. My special appreciation goes to Professor Bromberger, the director of my work.

To my wife, [redacted], for her patience and to my sons, Don and Steve, for their prodding impatience I must also offer genuine appreciation. The work could never have been completed without their willing participation and nudging support.

Contents

Introduction

Persistent critical attention has been directed to the poetry of Edward Taylor since Thomas H. Johnson's publication of The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor in 1939. However, even after scrupulous efforts by literary scholars, the life and works of Taylor continue to provoke questions. The same, obviously, can be said for the lives and literary achievements of numerous figures; after all, the work of the biographer and literary critic is theoretically never done. But Edward Taylor, owing to scant biographical data and perhaps the shortness of time since the publication of his work, poses confounding questions (e.g., the reason for Taylor's leaving England as a young man and the reason for his injunction against the publication of his writings). Central to this study, however, is a more intriguing question. Given the narrow religious setting of Colonial New England, a milieu which Willie T. Weathers correctly characterizes as not a very good school

for poets,[1] how does one account for poetry of the nature of the Preparatory Meditations, poetry celebrating man while taking note of his limitations and poetry focusing on a loving Christ rather than a militant Christ? The question appears to have gone largely unanswered.

Critical investigations have produced sundry responses to the question of Taylor's poetic and philosophic roots. Upon the discovery and publication of Taylor's poetry in 1939, Professor Johnson argued:

> The ardor of Taylor's love for Christ is displayed best in the songs which conclude God's Determinations and in the Meditations, but the reader need not search afield for analogues among the verses of the seventeenth-century conceitist to explain Taylor's choice of subject. It is true that the manner and devices of his poems especially suggest the example of George Herbert, the Anglican poet beloved so much by Puritans. Five of the unusual metrical patterns of God's Determinations exactly correspond to forms in Herbert's The Temple. There are, too, the same rhetorical devices of question, refrain, apostrophe, and direct address. There is an observable correspondence in the length of their songs, and it is further apparent that Taylor believes with Herbert that nothing is so mean but that it can be ennobled by figures from common life, from medical and chemical knowledge. He likewise draws heavily upon metaphors of taste, smell, color, and sound. But there are qualities as well in the verse which ally him more closely with Richard Crashaw than with Herbert: the moods of seraphic exaltation, in which the language of amorous poetry is adapted to religious ends: the prodigality of fanciful tropes; and the complete, almost physical abandonment to Christ. Yet clearly

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[1] Willie T. Weathers, "Edward Taylor and the Cambridge Platonists," AL, XXVI (1954), 1-31.

> Taylor does not merely imitate. He was possibly not conscious of the similarities, and in fact is unlikely to have read a line of Crashaw's poetry.[2]

Johnson, somewhat ambivalently, characterizes the poetry of Taylor, loosely linking him to the "metaphysicals" of England, then failing to join him with anyone at all: "On the whole, one's impression is that Taylor struck out for himself."[3] Though Professor Johnson's discovery and publication of Taylor's writings have been most important contributions to American literary history, his critical commentary has failed to illuminate sufficiently the question of Taylor's poetic and philosophic heritage.

In June, 1940, Howard Blake happily spoke of Johnson's literary find: "Exhumation of poetry written by a New England concettist [sic] some two hundred and more years ago might occasion excitement and some rejoicing. That we should have harbored a poet who might, with some plausibility, be spoken of together with Donne and Herbert is, indeed, a discovery."[4] To Blake's credit, it should be added that he tempered his joy, stating of Taylor: "He is no American Donne. Comparison of his

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[2] Edward Taylor, The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (New York, 1939), pp. 16-17.

[3] Johnson, p. 17.

[4] Howard Blake, "Seventeenth Century Yankee," Poetry LVI, 165-169.

work with his English prototypes will prove his stature and his inadvertent Americanism, a stretching for effect, a roughness in meter, a humorlessness of diction."[5] But quite apparently, Blake like Johnson saw Taylor's metaphysical leanings; they are difficult to overlook.

W. C. Brown, in November, 1944,[6] explored in some depth those metaphysical qualities, noting the stylistic elements most frequently associated with the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century: (1) discordia concors, (2) "sensuous apprehension of thought," (3) intentional ambiguity and specialized vocabulary, (4) the serious pun, oxymoron, and paradox, and (5) the juxtaposition of erudite and commonplace language. Of interest to Brown was Taylor's penchant for shocking his reader through a domestication of the divine. Brown found resulting contrasts "striking and original, but . . . not wholly successful. The ideas although heterogeneous, are too often merely 'yoked by violence together.'"[7] Yet, he could argue that after all reservations regarding Taylor's poetry have been registered, the colonial poet "remains the best

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[5] Blake, pp. 165-169.

[6] W. C. Brown, "Edward Taylor: American Metaphysical," AL, XVI (November, 1944), 186-197.

[7] Brown, p. 190.

American poet before Freneau and the first (and perhaps only) American Metaphysical."[8]

The period from 1944 to 1953 produced few critical commentaries relating to Edward Taylor. Nathalia Wright's article, "The Morality Tradition in the Poetry of Edward Taylor," appeared in American Literature.[9] This provocative article explored kinships between Taylor's loosely connected collection of poems God's Determinations and the tradition of the morality play. The same period gave rise to Willie T. Weathers' article suggesting Taylor's reliance upon classical texts from his library,[10] and depreciating articles from Sidney E. Lind[11] and Roy Harvey Pearce[12] (the latter two articles each rather narrowly conceived).

In 1953, Herbert Blau's observations in "Heaven's Sugar Cake: Theology and Imagery in the Poetry of Edward Taylor,"[13] unwittingly, it appears (since certain problems

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8 Brown, p. 197.

9 Nathalia Wright, "The Morality Tradition in the Poetry of Edward Taylor," AL, XVII (March, 1946), 1-18.

10 Willie T. Weathers, "Edward Taylor: Hellenistic Puritan," AL, XVIII (March, 1946), 18-26.

11 Sidney E. Lind, "Edward Taylor: A Revaluation," NEQ, XXI (1948), 518-530.

12 Roy Harvey Pearce, "Edward Taylor: The Poet as Puritan," NEQ, XXIII (1950), 31-46.

13 Herbert Blau, "Heaven's Sugar Cake: Theology and Imagery in the Poetry of Edward Taylor," NEQ, XXVI (1953), 337-360.

raised were never pursued), posed exciting questions relative to Taylor's philosophical bent. The questions grow out of Blau's assumptions regarding the nature of Taylor's poetry: (1) Does Taylor indeed look for "signs of saving grace in his poetry"? (2) Does he write "as if in a trance"? (3) Is the voice of Mercy in God's Determinations "very unlike the usual puritan voice"? (4) Does Taylor's poem "The Experience" indicate the rejection of Thomistic hierarchy? (5) Is the "sense of personal sin not as great in Taylor as in Donne"? and the overriding question, (6) Why? If Blau's assumptions be correct, why is it that Taylor, so much a part of the Colonial Puritan establishment, turns with such intensity to poetry and there seems to seek his God? Certainly some philosophic and/or religious views prompt him to cry,

> I'le Claim my Right: Give place, ye Angells Bright
> Ye further from the Godhead stande than I.
> My Nature is your Lord: and doth Unite
> Better than Yours unto the Deity.
> Gods Throne is first and mine is next: to you
> Onely the place of Waiting-men is due.[14]

Because these questions went unanswered, Taylor's philosophic and poetic roots continued deeply obscured into the year 1954.

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[14] Citations from Taylor are to The Poems of Edward Taylor, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven, 1960). References to the poems will appear in my text and will signify series number and poem number (i.e., 1.24.37-42).

In 1954, as if to answer at least partially the questions evoked by Blau's investigations, Willie T. Weathers wrote of "Edward Taylor and the Cambridge Platonists."[15] Central to Weathers' study is the view that Taylor, owing to his growth to manhood in England, came significantly under the influence of certain liberal theologians of the era, the Cambridge Platonists, who ultimately caused Taylor to write poetry after the manner of a "Platonic poet." Weathers suggests that the very personal expression in Taylor's poetry is indeed analogous to the "personal Platonism" of seventeenth-century England. Any personal religion acquired in New England would, after all, have been forged in the fires of rationalism and authoritarianism, Weathers argues. The argument poses possible solutions to questions raised by Herbert Blau. Weathers, however, fails to pursue in depth or with significant textual evidence the line of study he initiated.

Mindele Black's "Edward Taylor: Heaven's Sugar Cake" added another dimension to Taylor criticism in 1956.[16] While recounting Taylor's liking for the "homely conceits,"[17]

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15 Willie T. Weathers, "Edward Taylor and the Cambridge Platonists," AL, XXVI (1954), 1-31.

16 Mindele Black, "Edward Taylor: Heaven's Sugar Cake," NEQ, XXIX (1956), 1954-181.

17 A term used by Austin Warren in his article "Edward Taylor's Poetry: Colonial Baroque." KR, III (Summer, 1941), 355-371.

personal expression, and possible reliance upon the tradition of the morality play, Black additionally examines Taylor's poetry in the light of the Catholic meditative tradition, specifically Taylor's Puritan meditative tradition. Black argues that Taylor's poetry suggests the Catholic meditative theme in variation, that Taylorian tropes, though not always precisely those originated in the Counter-Reformation, approximate Catholic rhapsody and ecstasy. The love imagery, Black offers, derives from Catholic spirituality yet participates in a "disparate, sometimes dissonant [strain], in the Puritan devotional tradition."[18] Flamboyant and even erotic metaphors after the baroque manner are placed in juxtaposition with dry, Calvinistic doctrine. Happily, the greater part of Taylor's poetry escapes Puritan preachments, and Black briefly notes this distinctive nature of the concluding poems in God's Determinations and the Preparatory Meditations.

Louis L. Martz, in the foreword to Donald E. Stanford's 1960 edition of Edward Taylor's poetry, further discusses Edward Taylor's debt to the English "meditative style."

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[18] Black fails to narrow adequately the rather broad term "Catholic spirituality," thereby obscuring once again Taylor's philosophic heritage. Neither does he pursue the background of that "disparate, sometimes dissonant" Puritan strain.

Martz's critical thesis follows the outline of his earlier work, The Poetry of Meditation[19] (i.e., poetry frequently termed metaphysical or baroque is more correctly regarded as meditative owing to its heavy reliance upon the Renaissance meditative patterns). Martz examines several of Taylor's poems in this light, tracing the three essential elements in meditation: (1) the function of the Memory through composition of place, (2) the function of the Understanding through rumination, reflecting upon various implications of the moment contemplated, and (3) the function of the Will as the meditator enters into colloquy with the Father or the Son, signifying a change in affection (repentance) and state of being. The thesis, while illuminating certain aspects of Taylor's poetic style, fails to account for one overriding concern in the Preparatory Meditations and concomitant recurring patterns: mystical union and Taylor's kinship with early mystics along with Taylor's recurring metaphors of mysticism.

Norman Grabo, in his Edward Taylor,[20] takes note of Taylor's mystical directions; however, he chooses

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19 Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century (New Haven, 1954).

20 Norman Grabo, Edward Taylor (New York, 1961).

to examine neither the recurring metaphors of mysticism nor the discipline inherent in the Christian mystical tradition. Scattered critical efforts continuing to this present date also fail to bear directly on these matters.

It is the aim of this study to examine the mystic's effort toward union with God or the One and the impact of this idea upon Taylor's Preparatory Meditations. Successive chapters will treat the aims and methodologies (a term to be employed with some degree of fear and great care when discussing mysticism) of the mystic, the role of language in regard to mysticism, and the manner in which Taylor's Preparatory Meditations are informed conceptually, structurally, and metaphorically by Christian mysticism.

It appears that a study of this sort will contribute a few answers to those many questions raised by Taylor's poetry and subsequent critical studies. It is hoped that such a study will provide the reasons that Taylor's poetry focuses so longingly on a loving Christ rather than fearfully on a militant Christ and an explanation for the celebration of man in a colonial world so conscious of man's fall.

Perhaps some of the many questions stirred by Blau's article can be answered as well.

The task seems an enormous one, and it is highly unlikely that all of the questions cited will be satisfactorily answered. The field is promising, however, and someone must at least begin the harvest. The pages to come, then, trace in a limited manner the history of an idea--mystical union, and the manner in which that idea is evidenced in the efforts of Edward Taylor, Colonial poet and evangelist.

Chapter I
The Tradition of Union

It may appear inconceivable, at first thought, that Edward Taylor and Jan van Ruysbroeck would be mentioned in the same study. Taylor's critics largely have been "more at home" discussing the poet's debt to George Herbert, John Donne, or other "metaphysical poets." In most instances, these arguments have suggested only surface stylistic kinships. Little effort has been exerted in the direction of determining the premises on which Taylor has constructed his poetry, particularly the Preparatory Meditations. This study, though taking note of Taylor's "metaphysical" qualities, suggests justification for viewing Taylor as one poet in a continuing stream of literary figures who have sought mystical union with God.

Appropriately, "Maurice Maeterlinck, the Belgian poet who translated one of the major works of his medieval compatriot, Jan van Ruysbroeck, indicated in the preface of his translation that one should perhaps speak neither of a special birthday nor of a native

land of a mystic, as these data are rather irrelevant in comparison with the unisono of the opinion of practically all mystics."[1] Philosophical continuum, then, seems an appropriate term when discussing the phenomenon of mysticism, for "strangely enough, in mysticism, where we might expect far more capricious individual thinking than in science, there is a very considerable belief in an uninterrupted, steady flow of tradition."[2] Such a flow, however, does not suggest complete accord among participants in the tradition; Taylor's literary efforts obviously do not represent all-encompassing agreement with mystical predecessors. Language among mystics may differ, if only ever so slightly, owing to the era in which the communicant has lived or perhaps to other immediately influencing factors about him. The differences seem to occur most frequently in the area of terminology, though the varying terms almost always describe the same basic elements. It is possible, too, to find variations in

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[1] David Baumgardt, Great Western Mystics: Their Lasting Significance (New York, 1961), p. 12.

[2] Baumgardt, p. 12.

procedural matters. One possessed of a "mystical consciousness" may turn in upon himself and there find a world of harmony, while another may attain a like harmony in a manner most extrovertive, looking outward to the physical world. Yet, in Christian mysticism (that strain of mysticism with which this work is concerned), one aim is generally held: union with God.

Perhaps with excessive ardor,

> the Dane Edvard Lehmann, the French philosopher Emile Boutroux, the French literary critic Remy de Gourmont, the Englishman Thomas Hywell Hughes, the German theologians Albrecht Ritschl and Otto Pfleiderer, Erwin Rohde, the friend of Nietzsche, and Christian Janentzky, the historian of German literature, have emphatically stated that mysticism, at all times, is concerned with no more than one fundamental experience: the union of man with the Infinite, the unity of human consciousness with infinite reality, the unio mystica, the "spiritual nuptials," the copula spiritualis, in which man tries to lose his identity in an immensely greater life than his own--the life of God, an all-embracing life.[3]

But the enthusiasm with which each of these scholars places spiritual union at the center of Christian mysticism demonstrates the weight of this concern. The reader of this

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3 Baumgardt, p. 5. Baumgardt argues that the Judaeo-Christian tradition of mysticism is not limited to speculations on the relation of man to God. Nature, its inner structure, the entire scope of cosmic life, the importance of human history, and the "mystical meaning of good and evil" all come under the purview of the tradition, he states. Most scholars in mysticism conclude, however, that mystical union is an overriding and ultimate goal.

study will note that the structure informing this work centers on the concept of union, each chapter in its respective manner treating an aspect of the idea; "union" in essence becomes a synecdoche for Christian mysticism and the Christian mystical consciousness. But what are the characteristics of Christian mysticism and the mystical consciousness, and what is this union so zealously sought?

Each of the terms has been bandied about until definitions have been rendered ineffective. We are under obligation, however, to illuminate the terms, else a study of this nature only serves to add to the already confused state of things. The words from which "mysticism" is derived serve both to confound and illuminate: the Old French mystique, the Latin mysticus, and the Greek mustikós, all formed on the Greek múst$\bar{e}$s, suggest one initiated; múst$\bar{e}$s in turn is formed on m$\bar{u}$ein, suggesting to close (perhaps one's eyes or lips).[4] For some, the mere mention of the word "initiate" conjures scenes shrouded in darkness, ecstatic participation in glossolalia, and visions accompanied by mysterious voices.

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[4] C. T. Onions, The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology (New York, 1966), p. 600.

Henri Bergson correctly argues, however, that

> it is possible to parody mysticism, and the result will be mystic insanity: does it follow that mysticism is insanity? Yet there is no denying that ecstasies, visions, raptures, are abnormal states, and that it is difficult to distinguish between the abnormal and the morbid. And such indeed has been the opinion of the great mystics themselves. They have been the first to warn their disciples against visions which were quite likely to be pure hallucinations. And they generally regarded their own visions, when they had any, as of secondary importance, as wayside incidents; they had to go beyond them, leaving raptures and ecstasies far behind, to reach the goal, which was identification of the human will with the divine will.[5]

Mysticism, though it may encompass individuals who claim as initiates to have experienced visions and voices, does not rely upon such experiences. Mysterious communications of this sort are not, in fact, mystical phenomena: "What mystics say is that a genuine mystical experience is non-sensuous. It is formless, shapeless, colorless, odorless, soundless. But a vision is a piece of visual imagery having color and shape. A voice is an auditory image. Visions and voices are sensuous experiences."[6] This characterization of "genuine mystical experience" points

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[5] Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (New York, 1935), pp. 217-218.

[6] Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics (New York, 1960), p. 12.

back to the Greek mūein (to close either one's eyes or lips). By closing his eyes to the shapes and colors of the sensuous world, the initiate becomes privy to a knowledge beyond himself and his immediate world.

It is possible, of course, that mūein signified the closing of one's lips (i.e., upon receiving privileged knowledge, the initiate--owing to personal conviction or direct instruction--feels compelled to maintain his silence). If this was the force of the word originally, time and mystical practice have substantially weakened such an implication; quietism hardly characterizes Christian mysticism. Almost evangelistically the Christian mystic plunges into the world of action, seeking both to disclose his "good news" and participate in social service to his fellow man: "The great Christian mystics have commonly seen the danger in this natural tendency of mystical contemplation toward an amoralistic quietism, and have sought to guard against it. In other words, while influenced in an opposite direction, both psychologically and logically, by their mystical habits, experiences and ideas, they not uncommonly come out of their mystical

states with the same Christian practical and ethical principles and attitudes with which they sought to enter into them. Thus Eckhart affirms that 'it is better to feed the hungry than to spend one's time in contemplation.'"[7] Jan van Ruysbroeck, fourteenth-century Flemish mystic, concurs with this attitude toward the mystical life, arguing that while the mystic does indeed dwell in God, "yet he goes out toward created things in a spirit of love, in the virtues and in works of righteousness."[8] He further states that "Interior consolation is of an inferior order to the act of love which renders service to the poor."[9]

Mysticism, then (and perhaps peculiarly Christian mysticism), is characterized neither by frenetic ecstasies nor the desire to abnegate the world completely. He who would seek a person possessed of a Christian mystical consciousness would do well to direct his search not among the spiritual recluses, but rather among the religious activists. Correcting false impressions

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7 Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge (New York, 1940), p. 30.
8 Quoted in Macintosh, p. 30.
9 Quoted in Macintosh, p. 30.

regarding mysticism, however, falls short of defining the phenomenon.

W. R. Inge and Douglas Macintosh together provide a foundation on which we may begin to construct a clear understanding of the mystical ethos. Inge defines religious mysticism as "the attempt to realise the presence of the living God in the soul and in nature, or, more generally, as the attempt to realise, in thought and feeling, the immanence of the temporal in the eternal, and of the eternal in the temporal."[10] This definition, though rather broadly stated, points to several significant aspects of Christian mysticism: (1) God does indeed live, (2) He is in some manner assumed knowable, (3) His presence may be "felt" both within the soul and in nature, a belief which suggests that (4) one may bridge the gap or perhaps experience the bridging of the gap between Divine Essence and Human Essence.[11] Regarding the belief that God for the mystic is a reality, Macintosh says, "The religious

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[10] William Ralph Inge, Christian Mysticism (New York, 1933), p. 5.

[11] Mystics vary in their emphases upon God's presence in the soul (introvertive) and in nature (extrovertive). Additionally, while some mystics argue that man, almost solely through his own efforts, bridges the gap between the Human and the Divine, most conclude that man, following certain movements toward God, must passively await God's motions.

Object, God or the Absolute, is regarded as a reality, existing independently of all subjective human experience and realization of His power and presence."[12] God exists as an independent Essence; His existence requires no verification. And the mystic seeks Him, not to verify His existence but rather to gain knowledge of Him. When successful in his quest, the mystic claims "knowledge of God rather than mere belief or faith in him"; he "may be said to be a gnostic, in a broad interpretation of the term, and not an agnostic."[13]

But how can one "know," "see," or "feel" God? Inge suggests that for the mystic: (1) the soul is capable of seeing and perceiving; (2) because one is able to know only what is akin to himself, man to know God, must be a partaker of the Divine nature; (3) without holiness man will not be allowed to see God; therefore (4) a purging of the soul is required to remove the barriers to one's union with God, "but our guide on the upward path, the true hierophant of the mysteries of God, is love."[14] The soul's "eyes" must be cleansed; only then

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[12] Macintosh, p. 15.
[13] Macintosh, p. 15.
[14] Inge , p. 8.

will the soul be able to recognize its Source in whose likeness it was created.

Purgation serves as the first step in an ascending journey toward God; the mystic figures "his path as a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, which must be climbed step by step. This scala perfectionis is generally divided into three stages."[15] The purgative phase embodies an awareness of one's own inadequacies, thereby creating an atmosphere for confession and deeds of contrition. Together the private and public life demonstrate the mystic's desire to please his God; intensely, he may proclaim his worthlessness before God, yet manifest a worth in his compassion for man. Though the life necessitates discipline, need it include an extreme asceticism? Inge concludes,

> It would be easy to answer that asceticism means nothing but training, as men train for a race, or more broadly still, that it means simply "the acquisition of some greater power by practice." But when people speak of "asceticism," they have in their minds such severe "buffeting" of the body as was practised by many ancient hermits and mediaeval monks. Is this an integral part of the mystic's "upward path"? We shall find reason to conclude that, while a

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[15] Inge, p. 9. The three stages which Inge describes are the purgative life, the illuminative life, and the contemplative or unitive life.

> certain degree of austere simplicity characterises the outward life of nearly all the mystics, and while an almost morbid desire to suffer is found in many of them, there is nothing in the system itself to encourage men to maltreat their bodies. Mysticism enjoins a dying life, not a living death. Moreover, asceticism, when regarded as a virtue or duty in itself, tends to isolate us, and concentrates our attention on our separate individuality. This is contrary to the spirit of Mysticism, which aims at realising unity and solidarity everywhere.[16]

Though nothing in the system encourages maltreatment of one's body, few mystics fail to apply severe lashes verbally to their physical or earthly natures. Thus, the tutor in the Medieval treatise The Cloud of Unknowing instructs his initiate:

> Meekness in itself is nothing else than a true knowing and feeling of a man's self as he is. Any man who truly sees and feels himself as he is must surely be meek indeed. This meekness has two causes. One is the filth, the wretchedness, and the frailty of man into which he has fallen by sin, and which he must always feel in some degree as long as he lives in this life no matter how holy he is. The other is the overabundant love and worth of God in Himself, for in beholding this all nature quakes, all scholars are fools, and all saints and angels are blind. In fact, if it were not that through the wisdom of His Godhead he had judged their beholding of Him according to their ability in nature and in grace, I cannot say what would happen to them.[17]

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[16] Inge, p. 11.

[17] The Cloud of Unknowing, trans. Ira Progoff (New York, 1961), p. 92.

Man's "foul stinking pride," a product of original sin, is decried with the full knowledge that "Out of the original sin there will continually spring new and fresh stirrings of sin; and it will be necessary for you constantly to strike them down, cutting them down with a sharp, double-edged and dreadful sword of knowledge and will. By this you may see and learn that there is no steady security and no true rest in this life."[18] By this example, one can see the mystic's penchant for verbal self-flagellation.

Completing (within human limitations) the purgative phase of his journey, the mystic enters the illuminative life, and the struggle leading to God persists. Now, more than ever, the journey becomes a journey of the mind; the struggle gently rages in the inner man. Good deeds of a social nature must be put away for the moment. All energies must be directed toward God Himself, and all faculties (i.e., intellect, feeling, and will) must be given over to the Source of Being:

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[18] The Cloud, p. 138.

> The mystic state, claiming as it does to be a vision or perception of God, is inevitably one of intense concentration of attention, at first more or less voluntary, either upon God himself or it may be at first upon something else from which it is later transferred to the religious Object. This passes over into an involuntary rapt contemplation, and finally, in extreme instances, into an ecstatic seizure often culminating in an apparently unconscious trance. Now concentration of attention upon one object involves a corresponding withdrawal of attention from other objects, and rapt contemplation of God will naturally lead to inattention to and temporary unconsciousness of the environing world of events and things. The intensified mystical concentration of consciousness upon God and the consequent unconsciousness, during the mystical state, of all that is not God, naturally tend to be taken as revelation not only of the reality of God but of the unreality of all that is not God. [19]

Paradoxically, the mystic sharply focuses his mental faculties that he might divest himself of them. Like one preparing a sacrifice to the Lord, he readies the very best he has (his God-given intellect, feeling, and will), exercising each upon God or upon an object from which attention can later be transferred to God. Then, in a moment, and most frequently for only a brief moment, he claims to completely relinquish his intellect, sensory perception, and will. Theologically, the "rite" suggests Self-sacrifice; the communicant sheds Self to acquire

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[19] Macintosh, p. 21.

new identity. He parts with this world to achieve another. Psychologically, Stace argues,

> The theory of the matter is, I understand, something like this: It is practically impossible, or at least very difficult, to stop all sensing, imaging, and thinking by a forcible act of the will. What comes very near to it, however, is to concentrate one's attention on some single point or object so that all other mental content falls away and there is left nothing but the single point of consciousness. If this can be done, then ultimately that single point will itself disappear because contrast is necessary for our ordinary consciousness, and if there is only one point of consciousness left, there is nothing to form a contrast to it.[20]

Intense concentration upon an object or even God Himself is not the goal. Even sublime thought must give way to a vacuity of thought, for experience not thought is the journey's end.

The mystic, however, must carefully channel his thinking for a time, directing it single-mindedly to an object. Stace has suggested that the point of focus need not be God (though it frequently is in Christian mysticism); it may very well be the rhythm of one's own breathing or a repetitive, short verbal formula, often even nonsensical words. In this manner, the initiate begins to divorce himself from the world about him; detachment sets in, for eventually the repeated phrases (even if sublime

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[20] Stace, p. 18.

utterances) fall into meaninglessness. Stace says of this methodology:

> Emphasis on this is found just as much in Hinduism and Buddhism as in Christianity. What is sought is detachment from desire, the uprooting of desire, or at any rate of all self-centered desires. The exact psychology of the matter presents great difficulties. In Christian mysticism the idea of detachment is usually given a religious and moral twist by insisting that it means the destruction of self-will or any kind of self-assertiveness, especially the rooting out of pride and the attainment of absolute humility. In non-Christian mysticism detachment does not usually get this special slant. But in the mysticism of all cultures detachment from desires for sensations and images is emphasized.[21]

Once the communicant has purged his "mind's eye" of sensate things, opportunities for "seeing" God are significantly enhanced. At this juncture the mystic enters the final stage of his journey, which in reality is not so much a step in the mystic way as it is the goal itself.[22] The term "unitive," from the modern point of view, accurately describes this phase of the mystical life. Frequently, scholars of mysticism employ the

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[21] Stace, p. 19.

[22] This stage, though regarded as the last of the journey, will likely be repeated over and over by the thorough-going mystic, for union with God is regarded as an ever-continuing goal even though "there is a sense in which it is already fact, and not merely a thing desired." See Inge, p. 12.

adjective "contemplative." The twentieth-century mind, however, seems to have reserved for "contemplative" a definition unworkable in this context: thoughtful observation. From the mystic's point of view, the observation is not thoughtful at all, but rather a beholding which transcends thought. Bergson says, "Shaken to its depths by the current which is about to sweep it forward, the soul ceases to revolve round itself and escapes for a moment from the law which demands that the species and the individual should condition one another. It stops, as though to listen to a voice calling. Then it lets itself go, straight onward. It does not directly perceive the force that moves it, but it feels an indefinable presence, or divines it through a symbolic vision. Then comes a boundless joy, an all-absorbing ecstasy or an enthralling rapture: God is there, and the soul is in God."[23] This final phase in the mystic way, then, is properly termed "unitive," for here the mystic achieves that zealously sought goal: union with God. In a very real sense the mystic stands outside himself (which the word ecstasy suggests) standing rather in God. The soul has successfully bridged the gulf between itself and its

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[23] Bergson, pp. 218-219.

Source; the two are now joined as one.

That the two are one does not necessarily suggest the Christian mystic's complete identity with God. Rarely would a conscientious mystic so disturb Christian orthodoxy. Rather,

> Union is here interpreted . . . in terms of similarity of purpose. This gives us the clue to at least one Christian theory of the nature of mystical union, namely that put forward by St. John of the Cross. He writes of "that union and transformation of the soul in God which is only then accomplished when there subsists the likeness which only love begets. For this reason shall this union be called the union of likeness . . . which takes place when the two wills, the will of God and the will of the soul are conformed together neither desiring aught repugnant to the other." In other words, mystical union means only total and perfect agreement between the will of man and the will of God.[24]

Though interpretations of union range from identity consubstantial with God to Ruysbroeck's insistence upon union in duality,[25] the construction placed upon union by St. John of the Cross has gained the widest acceptance among mystics, likely owing to the ease with which one can fit the interpretation into traditional Christian

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[24] Stace, p. 129.

[25] Ruysbroeck insists upon the duality of God and the individual soul: "They always remain separate existences. But their union, he suggests, is like that of sunlight and air, or heat and the red-hot iron." Both sunlight and heat are distinct entities, separate from air and the red-hot iron; yet each penetrates its subject. See Stace, pp. 129-130.

thought. Unanimous agreement is evidenced in regard to the blessing of union: sheer joy and peace, each of which surpasses human understanding. Through the exercise of love, the communicant has journeyed into Pure Love and Light. The rapture cannot continue, however. Sensations begin to invade the mind, forcing the mystic back into the world of human relationships and communication.

Language and Mysticism

Every mystic does not labor under the compulsion to express his experience, nor does everyone whose writings might be called mystical claim his experience includes union with God. The experience may be indeed only struggling motions toward God. When verbal expression of this journey seems appropriate (or in some instances just possible), the mystic sets himself to the arduous task of communicating an intensely personal set of "feelings" and/or God Himself to another. Helen C. White correctly argues that verbalization does one of three things:

> At its simplest, it may bear witness to the goodness of God, taking the form of a narrative or account of God's graciousness. To no small extent, Saint Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle is of this character. Closely associated with this type is the narrative of the mystic's experiences, delivered from motives of brotherly charity that others may be moved

> to embark upon the same undertaking and may be guided and helped by the mystic's account of his experience. Bernard of Clairvaux' great series of sermons on the Canticle of Canticles is pre-eminently of this type. There is a third possible type, in which the expression becomes an instrument of mystical effort, a prayer for help in the way to God, an act of worship in itself designed to bring the spirit nearer to its goal, to promote that assimilation of spirit that is the objective of the mystic. In such a case, the expression may take on a ritualistic character, though, I think, the social implications of ritual are on the whole foreign to the essentially interior and highly personal enterprise of the mystic.[26]

Whichever of the three essential modes of expression elected (and it is, of course, possible for one to move somewhat freely, in and out, among these forms of expression), the mystic encounters what appears an insoluble problem: how to describe the glories of God and the journey in love to God.

The problem is crucial, for "Love cannot be said, it cannot be expressed in words, it is ineffable. (Since language requires so many logical conditions, some part of what is not rational thought cannot be fitted into the sentence or discourse.) From this inevitable impossibility of finding an equivalent in words is deduced the necessity of poetry. When love is expressed, its object escapes. But in a partial attempt it can be caught. How? By poetic circumlocution; and thus, with 'figures, comparisons, and similitudes' one

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[26] Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 27.

can suggest something of the 'secret mysteries.'"[27] The mystic, then, vainly attempts to describe the nature of his love for God and the content of his experience in a logical language; in each effort, he builds for himself "a kingdom of metaphor."[28]

Frequently, elemental to this "kingdom" is the tripartite structuring of the verbal expression. Though the three-fold division might be accounted for superficially (i.e., by the suggestion that division into three parts merely represents a trinitarian view) and pocketed in the broad Christian tradition, often a careful examination that avoids the automatic response will direct one to and then beyond the trinity. For the division, most of all, is calculated to represent spatially the journey toward God: purgation and illumination on the scala perfectionis, leading to the unitive way. With this type of symbolic representation, the tradition narrows to a mystical sort.

Inge posits that "spatial ideas are our clearest ideas,"[29] and certainly a heightening effect is established in a reader's mind as he moves through purgation and illumination into an impending or real presence of God. However, it is the content

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[27] Jorge Guillén, Language and Poetry (Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 91.
[28] Alfred P. Stiernotte, Mysticism and the Modern Mind (New York, 1959), p. 109.
[29] Inge, p. 81.

of each of these structural units which most significantly informs us of the torturous journey to God, for the mystical poet in each of the formal elements strives to relate stages of his experience in figurative language.

Somewhat remarkably, writers influenced by mysticism generally share a common body of figurative language, whether they be of the third century A.D. (Plotinus), the sixteenth century (St. John of the Cross), or the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Edward Taylor). Neither the span of time nor the regional environment alters the language substantially, for the aim of each writer remains the same: an expression of union sought, and in some instances, union attained. It is as though the writer is by the nature of the experience limited to a core of figures in his symbolic statement.

This certain sameness by no means denigrates the writings of the mystics. Rather, the inherent limitations of a mystical work often give rise to conceptual and technical ingenuity in a manner not unlike one's working effectively within the tight sonnet form. Guillén speaks of this creativity:

> Man cannot say anything when he is alone with God.
> In this speechless plight, when the spirit is silenced
> by all that it has to express, no language will serve,
> unless something completely new can be invented.
> Picture the man in this moment of tragic muteness.

> Neither his saintliness nor his virtues nor his marvelous experiences will come to his aid. But the soul is capable of creating a new form of a poem. Everything that has been so intimately lived will now be just as expressively invented.[30]

Though Guillén pleads too dramatically for a newly invented language, his argument is essentially accurate. Each newly created poem, though it participates in a tradition, is a new "invention" of words, if for no other reason than the writer's involvement in the process of selection and arrangement of those words.

The literary mystical continuum of which we have spoken is indeed an established tradition, spanning continents and widely divergent eras of time. The matrix in which the poetry itself is constructed is the mystical experience with its attempts toward achieving union with God, and the shared experiences of various ages manifest themselves in the poetry conceptually, structurally, and metaphorically.

Successive chapters in this work will require textual analysis of Edward Taylor's poetry (in particular the Preparatory Meditations) with regard to the manner in which conceptual mysticism informs the structure of his poetic achievement. Metaphor will then be considered, particularly

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[30] Guillén, p. 120.

as it relates to the central mystical concern for union. Representative efforts by other writers generally accepted as mystics will be introduced for comparative studies when judged appropriate.

Chapter II
Taylor and the Problem of Union

Structure in the Preparatory Meditations

The term "structure" would strike fear in the heart of almost any thorough-going mystic, as it might in the hearts of many modern writers. The concept for each seems to smack of artificial restrictions, incursions upon spontaneity. Of course, even the mystic cannot avoid ordering either his experience or the representation of his experience entirely. Though the idea of form is essentially antithetical to the mystic view (since the journeyer seeks escape from the world of forms into the world of formlessness), the mystic does employ a methodology, however loosely, to strive for and perhaps achieve union with God. He further must resort to form for the representation of that experience. Even so simple a matter as committing characters (letters) to pages suggests form. It is the nature of the structural quality in Taylor's poetry with which this chapter is concerned, the manner in which mystical elements inform the ordering of the poetry.

Bergson argues in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion that "we must above all bear in mind that pure mysticism is a rare essence, that it is generally found in a diluted form, that even then it still gives to the substance with which it mingles its colour and fragrance. . . ."[1] The suggestion is that mysticism is not so calcified as to disallow variety, that, in fact, even the variation (perhaps "a diluted form") possesses a dynamism about it that ensures its worth. This is another way of saying that literature to be mystical in character need not manifest a full array of prescribed elements regarded as mystical any more than a poem to be metaphysical must possess each generally accepted metaphysical characteristic.

Interestingly, whatever "dilution" occurs seems to occur in the face of authoritarian pressure. Walter Stace speaks of such instances in his discussion of Meister Eckhart's mysticism: "In Christianity the Roman church was so powerful that in general it succeeded in enforcing its will upon the mystics. An Eckhart may tend toward heretical language and get himself into trouble. But the vast majority of the great Catholic mystics were submissive and managed to give an interpretation of 'union with God' which could be accommodated

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[1] Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion (New York, 1935), p. 202.

to strict orthodoxy."[2] Perhaps a colonial Taylor bowed in politic fashion to a no less severe orthodoxy in Puritan New England. Whatever the cause, Taylor did mold and structure his concept of union into a form generally acceptable to his contemporaries, utilizing the Lord's Supper as his ordering force for union and consequently for much of his poetry.

> Taylor's Sacramental Meditations was motivated by his feeling of mystical union with Christ at the time of his partaking of the Eucharist, and such mystical union, it should be emphasized, was quite in accord with Calvin's interpretation of the Lord's Supper and with the Westminster Confession. Calvin asserted the real spiritual presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper and the union of Christ with the believer: "And because this mystery of the secret union of Christ with believers is incomprehensible by nature, he exhibits a figure and image of it in visible signs, peculiarly adapted to our feeble capacity; and as it were, by giving tokens and pledges, renders it equally as certain to us as if we beheld it with our eyes. . . . Now, though all these things are connected with faith, yet I leave no room for this cavil; as though, when I say that Christ is received by faith, I intended that he is received merely in the understanding and imagination; for the promises present him to us, not that we may rest in mere contemplation and simple knowledge, but that we may enjoy a real participation of him." And Calvin also wrote: "Therefore, if, by the breaking of the bread, the Lord truly represents the participation of his body, it ought not to be doubted that he truly presents and communicates it. . . . If it be true that the visible sign is given to us to seal the donation of the invisible substance, we ought to entertain a confident

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[2] Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics (New York, 1960), p. 128.

> assurance, that in receiving the symbol of his body, we at the same time truly receive the body itself." The Westminster Confession, in which Taylor asserted his belief at the time of his ordination, affirms the real spiritual presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper: "Worthy Receivers outwardly partaking of the visible Elements in this Sacrament, do then also inwardly by Faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death; the Body and Blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the Bread or Wine; yet as really, but spiritually present to the Faith of Believers in that Ordinance, as the Elements themselves are to their outward senses.[3]

The Preparatory Meditations, a collection of 217 poems written between 1682 and 1725, represents an impressive body of poetry in search of God; He is to be found (and a union with Him and/or His Son sought) at the Lord's Table, but not without sufficient preparation. The complete title of the collection suggests the intention and, to some degree, the nature of the poetry: Preparatory Meditations before my Approach to the Lords Supper. Chiefly upon the Doctrin preached upon the Day of administration.[4] For some forty-four years Taylor composed monthly poems to suit him for a possible meeting with God; such a meeting would indeed be impossible without suitable

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[3] Donald E. Stanford, "Edward Taylor and the Lord's Supper," AL, XXVII (1955), 172-178.

[4] An earlier note cited the Stanford text of Taylor's poetry. It is perhaps important to note that PM earlier had been titled Sacramental Meditations mistakenly. See Stanford, p. 5, n. Original spelling and punctuation are retained above.

preparation. Norman Grabo comments on the devotional poetry, at times citing Taylor's 1694 sermons on the Lord's Supper:

> The sacrament requires the most devout preparation: baptism, hearing the Word, conversion, and "prayer, meditation, and self-examination," which Taylor says "are of special use /to/ prepare the soul for this feast." To these he adds contemplation, and so fills out the preparatory requirements for the sacrament.
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> In describing the preparatory act, Taylor uses the term "meditation" and "contemplation" interchangeably. Contemplation goes hand in hand with self-examination; they are so close, in fact, that "examination cannot be without contemplation." As a result, he exhorts his congregation to "meditate upon the feast--its causes, its nature, its griefs, its dainties, its reasons and ends, and its benefits, etc--for it carries in its nature and circumstances an umbrage or epitomized draught of the whole grace of the Gospel." Of course this is exactly what Taylor did in his own poetic meditations, which he called Preparatory. Such preparation, he adds, will "stir up all sacramental graces: repentance, faith, love, humility, a discerning eye, hunger and thirst after communion with God in Christ, thankfulness, and holy joy in the Lord" (1694, p. 168); and these are the very affections expressed in his poetry.[5]

The intensity of preparation and the expectation of values to be gained suggest the centrality of the Supper.

In stating that Taylor employed the Lord's Supper as an ordering force for union and consequently for a substantial

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[5] Norman S. Grabo, Edward Taylor (New York, 1961), p. 35.

amount of his poetry, I am not arguing that Taylor merely manipulated the memorial feast to serve mystical ends. Here is a supper most divine. In his Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper, a series of sermons presented largely in refutation of Solomon Stoddard's belief that the Supper serves as a converting ordinance,[6] Taylor argues for the supremacy of this ordinance over all others God has enjoined upon men, indicating additionally that only certain select ones might partake:

> The reason why it stands to be celebrated as the last of all ordinances common to all the people of God is because it requires all the other ordinances to have done their work in order to fit the soul for this. Observe it, and you shall find in all cases wherein anything is constantly fixed in the last place, and you shall see that thing most complete in its kind. Man, the last in the creation, is the glory of all elementary nature. The image of God in man, the last draught of God upon him, is the glory of man. Come to artificial instances, and here it holds: all things of less considerations are first touched on, but that which is last entered on is of the greatest concern. Subordinate arts are to fit for divinity: lower exercises are to fit for a more noble imploy. First the blossom, then the bud or your fruit, then the ripe, then the use. First the schoolmaster, then the college tutor, then the imployment [sic] of what nature soever. So it is in all moral cases, those things that

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6 Edward Taylor, Edward Taylor's Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper, ed. Norman S. Grabo (Michigan State Univ. Press, 1966), xix-xxxii. Also see Grabo's Edward Taylor, pp. 31-39 for further discussion of Stoddard and Taylor's arguments regarding the nature and purposes of the Lord's Supper.

> are set in the last place require the accomplishments which former means are used for to produce in order thereunto. The education of childhood apprenticeship fits for freemanship of trades. So that such offices and things that are always last attained to do require the greatest accomplishments in order thereunto. And so it is in the things of God. First the Word is to be received, then baptism, then /a/ church state, then the Lord's Supper. Hence I say, it appears according to the harmony that runs through all things that the ordinance is no converting ordinance that is to be administered always after all other ordinances common to all God's people. I say to all, because there is the ordinance of binding which doth exclude from this ordinance, that when it is administered, it's after this administered. But that hath not all God's people for its recipient subject, but only such as appear to be /put/ into the respect of an heathen man or a publican.[7]

One can see how very important the observance of this feast is to Taylor, but equally interesting is the striking similarity between Taylor's argument for the Lord's Supper as last in the order of things and the mystical scala perfectionis with its unitive achievement at the end of that scale.

Consider, in the traditional mystic way one moves through the stages of purgation and illumination to union with God. The two preparatory phases necessary to union involve confession of one sort or another predicated upon a

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[7] Taylor, Treatise, pp. 102-103.

contrite spirit, hearty amendment of one's actions within human limitations, and careful concentration of all the faculties (i.e., the intellect, feeling, and will) upon God or the Christ. Only when one has so suited himself for union will he achieve it. In like fashion, Taylor sees an extended number of requisites as necessary to the observance of the Lord's Supper: baptism, hearing the Word of God, conversion, prayer, meditation, self-examination, and contemplation. Only after such rigorous "exercises" is one prepared for the Table of the Lord or communion, a term which for the seventeenth century suggested spiritual intercourse or union.

Additionally of interest is Taylor's spatial imagery, suggesting movement from lower services and/or stations to higher: God's creation ranged from elementary nature to glorious man, life moves from blossom to bud to fruit to ripeness and finally usefulness, education begins with the schoolmaster but is followed by instruction from the college tutor and concluded by the student's applying acquired knowledge, and apprenticeships provide foundations for trades. The heightening effect is apparent. One moves upward through stages of preparedness to a final state of readiness in which he might meet God, for "so it is in the

things of God."

As if to reinforce his concept of union and its relationship to the Lord's Supper, Taylor in his Treatise suggests,

> The giving, receiving, eating and drinking, emblems of grace, and of our duty to live upon Christ spiritually, require the exercise of faith on Christ, to live on Him, feed on Him, and to grow up in Him. Now, Soul herein lieth an answerableness in thee unto the several ministerial actions in the celebration of this ordinance, and hearty praise in the concluding hymn.
>
> Wrap up your spirit in faith, love, humility, joy, thankfulness, and praise, and send it up to heaven in intervening and occasional ejaculatory addresses through the whole of the ordinance as occasion offers itself. Oh! this is excellent. Attend these things.[8]

One's spirit is wrapped (and the implication is that it is also rapt) in faith and love, with other Christian attributes, and given over or transported to God. The ecstasy, in which the spirit stands outside the body, unites the child of God with the Father and demands brief, ejaculatory expressions. The experience, though ineffable, gives rise to extremely short, staccato-like sounds of rapture, not at all unlike those described by Stace.[9] Guillén comments on like mystical transportation and man's inability to transmit its meaning: "For the incapacity of man to speak of it and describe it in words was shown by Jeremiah, when, after God had spoken with

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[8] Taylor, Treatise, p. 215.

[9] Stace, p. 19.

him, he knew not what to say, save 'Ah, ah, ah!' etc."[10] Taylor's "Oh! this is excellent"[11] and other cries of ecstasy have their analogues in Jeremiah's groans of delight and diverse expressions of mystical joy over extended ages.

It is apparent that the Lord's Supper occupies a central place in the mind of Taylor, that it does indeed order his approach to God, and that in its observance one might be "ushered into the presence of God." What then is the role of the Preparatory Meditations in the way to God? And how are they structured specifically to meet the demands of their role? In a certain sense, the answer to the first question provides the answer to the second, for "what" the Meditations are determined largely "how" they would be. Idea or content, in other words, dictated form as selective textual analysis later will show.

Helen C. White's three categories of mystical expression cited earlier are of assistance at this point. Her groupings provide us with sharp insights to what Taylor's efforts are about. The first of her categories accounts for poetry written largely in celebration of God, "taking the form of a

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[10] Jorge Guillén, Language and Poetry (Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 93.

[11] It is difficult to determine from the context whether Taylor recommends "Oh! this is excellent" as an expression of joy or merely employs it as a commentary on the excellency of the Supper. In either case, he calls for appropriate cries of acclamation.

narrative or account of God's graciousness."[12] The second details the experiences the mystic has undergone in his journey with the express purpose of guiding others into that same way. The poetic effort here, like the first, is public. In the third, the poetic statement "becomes an instrument of mystical effort, a prayer for help in the way to God, an act of worship in itself designed to bring the spirit nearer to its goal, to promote that assimilation of spirit that is the objective of the mystic."[13] It is this last classification that most appropriately defines the nature of the Meditations; they are largely the private strugglings, even writhings, of a man in continuing search of God.

The sermons or "doctrin" [sic] on which the poems are based served the public, of course; the poems, however, met the private needs of Taylor. Both were preparatory to the observance of the Lord's Supper, the sermon primarily designed to prepare the congregation and the poem solely composed for Taylor's personal approach to God: a sermon centering on the sacrificial Christ was written, a poem was constructed on the foundation of that sermon, the sermon was delivered on the day of memorial observance (also hopefully absorbed), and the

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[12] Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1966). p. 27.

[13] White, p. 27.

congregation of prepared ones "communed with God." These ordered steps sound rather perfunctory, perhaps, and, to be sure, we have no way of determining how fully each member of Taylor's congregation participated in this rite. For some the ritual was likely only ritual. For Taylor the memorial feast was an opportunity to dine with, even unite with, Divinity. It was essential that he be prepared, and preparation demanded severe examination of self.

The Meditations: Purgation and Illumination

In his Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper, Taylor instructs his reader regarding the proper approach to the Lord's Table: "That you stand clear from all defiling things; keep you far from an evil matter. Stand clear from sin. This is the only soul-defiling thing. Hate the garment spotted with the flesh. Oh! abhor it, come not nigh it, fly from it both in heart and life, purge away this evil thing both in heart, affections, and conversations. And thus to do will be to keep your garment clean."[14] The spiritual advice extended his reader was carefully heeded by Taylor himself, as evidenced in the Meditations. With few exceptions, each of the poems in its opening lines

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[14] Taylor, Treatise, p. 199.

presents the reader with a view of the first phase in the journey to God: purgation.

> . . .as a Chrystall Glass, I broke, and lost
> That Grace, and Glory I was fashion'd in
> And cast this Rosy World with all its Cost
> Into the Dunghill Pit, and Puddle Sin.
> All right I lost in all Good things, each thing
> I had did hand a Vean of Venom in.
>
> Oh! Sad-Sad thing! Satan is now turnd Cook:
> Sin is the Sauce he gets for ev'ry Dish.
> I cannot bite a bit of Bread or Roote
> But what is sopt therein, and Venomish.
> Right's lost in what's my Right. Hence I do take
> Onely what's poison'd by th'infernall Snake.
>
> But this is not the Worst: there's worse than this.
> My Tast is lost; no bit tasts sweet to mee,
> But what is Dipt all over in this Dish
> Of Ranck ranck Poyson: this my Sauce must bee.
> Hell Heaven is, Heaven hell, yea Bitter Sweet:
> Poison's my Food: Food poison in't doth keep.
> (1.31.7-24)

The keen sense of guilt upon introspection perhaps disturbs the modern mind. To so denigrate self seems unduly harsh, but one must remember the intention: to transfer affection from the self to another Self. This feat can be accomplished only if one sees no worth in his own person, casts that person aside, and seeks union with another of value. Thus, it is far from surprising to find Taylor in a "dunghill pit," "puddle of sin," or "sauce of evil." On occasion, the opening lines achieve even greater stridency:

My Sin! my Sin, My God, these Cursed Dregs,
Green, Yellow, Blew streakt Poyson hellish, ranck,
Bubs hatcht in natures nest on Serpents Eggs,
Yelp, Cherp and Cry; they set my Soule a Cramp.
I frown, Chide, strik and fight them, mourn and Cry
To Conquor them, but cannot them destroy.

I cannot kill nor Coop them up: my Curb
'S less than a Snaffle in their mouth: my Rains
They as a twine thrid, snap: by hell they're spurd:
And load my Soule with swaggering loads of pains.
Black Imps, young Divells, snap, bite, drag to bring
And pick mee headlong hells dread Whirle Poole in.
(1.39.1-12)

With brilliance of color, imagination in visions conjured, and abrasion in sound Taylor enters a Dantean hell. The struggle rages within against Sin and self, which for all practical purposes are synonymous at this juncture on the way to God: to cry "My Sin! my Sin" is to cry "I! I!"

Certainly the initial stage of the journey demands concentration on the "I," awareness of one's undone or incomplete state, and a large segment of Taylor's Meditations opens with just such focus. However, failure to adjust in focus indicates failure to progress on the scale to perfection. Taylor says of the next preparatory state:

> Herein lieth the turn of the soul from sin to God in Christ, and this carries the soul from sin and sinful ways to God in Christ, grace, and the ways of God in Christ. Hence the soul comes off from sin, is out with it, dislikes it, hates it, grieves on this account, is burdened with it, loathes it as nothing and worse than nothing in his own eyes. Hence he lies low, humble, penitent; prays, begs a pardon, etc., the like: his heart is drawn away from it unto God and Christ. Hence love, longing, esteem, hungering and thirsting after God, Christ, grace, holiness, conformity to God

> habitually, actually, and the like holy ends and designs, an holy life and ways, tenderness of conscience, and watchfulness follow.[15]

It is precisely this kind of conceptual shift which characterizes the Meditations: movement from angry, verbal barrages against oneself to almost quiet pleadings with God and celebration of His grandeur, indicative of Taylor's entering the second phase on his journey to God.

The illuminative stage on the mystic's way to God, as represented in chapter one, requires intense discipline. It is at this point on the way he must concentrate all his faculties (intellect, feeling, and will) on God. Taylor likewise moves with deliberation from self toward God. "Meditation 1.31," of which stanzas two and three were cited earlier, illustrates the progression. The movement is from the repetitive "I," "mine," "my," and "mee" of stanzas one through four to the "we" and "us" of stanza five:

> What e're we want, we cannot Cry for, nay,
> If that we could, we could not have it thus.
> The Angell's can't devise, nor yet Convay
> Help in their Golden Pipes from God to us.
> (1.31.25-28)

The shift in focus here, very nearly imperceptible, seems to suggest Taylor's need to initiate the death of self by

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[15] Taylor, Treatise, p. 202.

wrapping it in the traditional Everyman or universal "us." The "I" can reenter the poem only after the introduction and celebration of the Lord:

> But thou my Lord, (Heart leape for joy and sing)
> Hast done the Deed: and't makes the Heavens ring.
>
> By mee all lost, by thee all are regain'd.
> All things are thus fall'n now into thy hands.
> And thou steep'st in thy Blood what Sin had stain'd
> That th'Stains, and Poisons may not therein stand.
> And having stuck thy Grace all o're the same
> Thou giv'st it as a Glorious Gift again.
>
> Cleare up my Right, my Lord, in thee, and make
> Thy Name stand Dorst upon my Soule in print,
> In grace I mean, that so I may partake
> Of what I lost, in thee, and of thee in't.
> I'l take it then, Lord, at thy Hand, and sing
> Out Hallelujah for thy Grace therein.
> (1.31.29-42)

The "I" of the initial lines has undergone a conversion, though incomplete; it has concentrated upon and intellectualized the Christ, expressed its love for Him, and exercised its will in seeking the pleasure of another Self. It now possesses the potential for union.

Clearly, the preparatory action advised in Taylor's Treatise and discharged in this poem, representative of so many of the meditations, parallels the first two states along the mystic's way. A study of what Taylor calls "Examination" and "Conviction"[16] indicates that the combined preparatory

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[16] Taylor, Treatise, pp. 200-202.

actions coincide with purgation; "Conversion" and "Contemplation"[17] constitute the mystic's illumination. The climactic third and last state occurs outside or beyond the poem, a matter to be discussed fully in successive chapters. The structure considered to this point, however, is of a conceptual or philosophical sort, manifesting itself in movement from purgation to illumination and demanding shifts in focus and poetic mood. Another element informs structure in the general body of the Meditations; and though rooted in colonial theology, its function is often more aesthetic (even dramatic) than theological.

The Dramatic Personae

To read Taylor's Meditations successfully, one must understand that he is confronted with a continuing drama in which a major character (and owing to the private nature of each meditation, it seems unavoidable that one would identify that character as Taylor) remains near the center of each dramatic presentation, changing masks as necessary. Central to the drama is the memorial feast already discussed in some detail. Another element of importance in the observance

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[17] Taylor, Treatise, pp. 202-204 ff.

of this feast, however, is the fact that Taylor understands it not only as commemorative of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Christ but also as celebrative of man's marriage to divinity:

> Christ, in His treating men, is pleased to treat them as men, else He would never have taken man's nature upon Him. Now if you observe, you shall find His dealing with us in the great concerns of our souls frequently set out by metaphors and parables alluding to men's dealings in their concerns. The parable whereof our text hath a great interest is of such a nature. Hence the whole dispensation of the gospel in the ministry of the Word in it is set out by the king's servants sent to call the invited persons to celebrate the marriage of his son. Now, then, this holds out a wedden between the soul and Christ, and Christ will have it celebrated.[18]

The primary text of which Taylor speaks is taken from Matthew twenty-two, and his argument is striking: (1) Christ demonstrated his kinship with man by taking humanity on Himself, (2) such a concern on the part of the Christ established the opportunity for a marriage between a created one and his Creator, and (3) the celebration of the Lord's Supper or marriage feast "declares the soul to be espoused into Christ."[19] representing as it does the "consummating and sealing duty of the gospel."[20] On this theological foundation the

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[18] Taylor, Treatise, p. 17.
[19] Taylor, Treatise, p. 37.
[20] Taylor, Treatise, p. 26.

Meditations, preparatory to Taylor's participation in this "wedden feast," presents one with a series of dramatic projections in which many of the poems represent Taylor as an attendant at the celebration. Though roles and dramatic situations vary, some seeming to have no connection with the memorial supper, one of two roles is frequently assumed: honored guest at the feast or the espoused of Jesus.

Taylor's Treatise elaborates on the theological aspects of the two roles in language reminiscent of the Meditations. Of the guest he says,

> The glory and honor put upon all such as come preparedly to celebrate this gospel marriage feast. A marriage feast is the highest of all civil feasts, and the highest civil honor that persons can confer upon their friends lies in their inviting them unto and entertaining them in the same. But if the wedden [sic] be the marriage of a king's son, then what higher honor can be imagined than to be an invited and welcome guest thereunto? But this is the honor and glory that God confers on all such as rightly attend this wedden.[21]

Taylor continues his discussion of the guest's privileges (e.g., he is grandly attired, enjoys the richest of foods, and of greatest significance, is admitted to the presence of the Bridegroom).[22] Of the feast and the role of the espoused one he argues, "it is not such a celebration of

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[21] Taylor, Treatise, p. 20.
[22] Taylor, Treatise, p. 20.

another's espousals, as doth exclude the souls that celebrate it."[23] That is, one may be seen paradoxically as both guest and the celebrated or betrothed one. As the betrothed, one is represented as having

> a new disposition. Your frame of spirit and constitution is changed. You are now run into a new mold. You have wedden affection. Your heart is as espoused to Christ. Oh! your love to His is great; your joy in Him is sweet; your reverence of Him is high; your zeal for Him is hot. Oh! the very frame and disposition is a Christ-like frame and disposition; and therefore try by this.
>
> You have a wedden-like behavior. You walk as dressed up for the wedden. Your port, your gait, is suitable to your garments. Your life is a life of holiness. Holy garments and an holy life suit one another. Every thrid of this garment is a twine of holiness, and hence the web is holy, and the person that wears it, wears it only in holy ways. Now then try thy life. Is it a life of holiness, yea or no? Answer this. If thou walk not in ways of holiness, thou hast not this wedden garment. But if thy walk be holy, thy wear is the wedden garment.[24]

Theology and drama unite in the Meditations, and both manifest themselves in the structure discussed earlier: purgation and illumination. When Taylor represents himself as an attendant at the feast, he is in the beginning of the poem most frequently an unworthy attendant: a guest who would

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[23] Taylor, Treatise, p. 37.

[24] Taylor, Treatise, p. 58.

eat and drink of the "dainties" but senses he has no right, decrying his failing appetite and/or other signs of worthlessness (1.8, 1.11, 1.31, 2.13, 2.62, etc); or a guest who would sing praises of the honored one, either offering his musical gift in celebration or, in some instances, rendering his musical services in payment for the meal enjoyed, but finds his abilities less than sufficient for the occasion (1.21, 1.32, 2.43, etc.). He may also appear as a guest who believes his apparel unfit for such a grand gathering; the gathering is grand, of course, because of the presence of the bridegroom. Though Taylor is unquestionably a major character in each little drama, the central figure is the bridegroom whose immediate presence is more often "felt" than seen.

As each meditation progresses, self-denigration gives way to growing confidence, not so much in self as in the Lord. All centers on the Master, particularly in this illuminative stage. It is He who possesses the power to bestow blessings of a special sort. It is He who can create the appetite for spiritual delicacies, enable one to sing with skill and beauty, cause one to strum the harp with dexterity, and empower one to write mellifluous poetic lines (though some critics doubt this last grace of lyricism was ever given to Taylor). And the attendant at the feast envisions each capability as his,

potentially. The gifts hover about him at the outer edge of each poem, awaiting realization.

> My Earthen Vessell make thy Font also;
> And let thy Sea my Spring of Grace in't raise.
> Spring up oh Well. My Cup with Grace make flow.
> Thy Drops will on my Vessell ting thy Praise.
> I'l sing this Song, when I these Drops Embrace.
> My Vessell now's a Vessell of thy Grace.
> (1.28.25-30)

> Lord, Cleanse mee thus with thy Rich Bloods Sweet Shower
> My Issue stop: destroy my Leprosy.
> Thy Holy Oyle upon my Head out poure
> And cloathe my heart and Life with Sanctity.
> My Head, my Hand and Foot shall strike thy praise
> If thus besprinkled, and Encamp thy Wayes.
> (2.27.61-66)

> Lord feed mine eyes then with thy Doings rare,
> And fat my heart with these ripe fruites thou bearst.
> Adorn my Life well with thy works, make faire
> My Person with apparrel thou prepar'st.
> My Boughs shall loaded bee with fruits that spring
> Up from thy Works, while to thy praise I sing.
> (2.56.55-60)

> What Wisdom's here? My Lord, what Grace? What bright
> Encheckerd Works, more rich than Rubies fair?
> Doe thou my Soule with this Rich trade delight
> And bring mee thus into thy promisd aire
> Wherein my Virginalls shall play for joy
> Thy Praise with Zions virgins Company.
> (2.58.121-126)

Anticipation undergirds each poem in the Meditations, for each serves to represent only part of a whole experience: one decries his own worthlessness and/or inability to serve, determines that another can empower him, pleads for that endowment, and--waits. The same basic pattern appears in other dramatic presentations of the struggle toward God, some of which introduce the espoused

of the Christ.

The dramatic setting remains essentially the same: friends of the bridegroom when they appear in the poem, are attendants to the wedding feast; and the bridegroom continues to command attention, remaining the central character of each poem. Now, however, the point of view shifts, and the reader "sees" the bridegroom through the eyes of the bride to be.

As in previous poems, the drama begins with the first stage of the scala perfectionis. The newly espoused, not unlike the earlier guests at the feast, expresses her worthlessness (even registering astonishment at the Christ's willingness to enter a relationship with one so unworthy).

> My Soule, Lord, quailes to think that I should bee
> So high related, having such coulours faire
> Stick in my Hat, from Heaven: yet should see
> My Soule thus blotcht: Hells Liveries to beare.
> What Thine? New-naturizd? Yet this Relation
> Thus barren, though't's a Priviledg-Foundation?
>
> Shall I thy Vine branch be, yet grapes none beare?
> Grafft in thy Olive stand: and fatness lack?
> A Shackeroon, a Ragnell, yet an Heire?
> Thy spouse, yet, oh! my Wedden Ring thus slack?
> Should Angel-Feathers plume my Cap, I should
> Be swash, but oh! my Heart hereat grows Cold.
> (1.37.1-12)

Taylor, moving from metaphor to metaphor with abandon, fails to sustain with any great degree of success the primary direction the poem seeks to take, but perhaps calculatedly so.[25] He does,

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[25] The words "Shackeroon" and "Ragnell" (wanderer) seem to suggest the Augustinian restlessness seeking rest in God. The diverse images appear to mirror this concept well known to Taylor.

however, move unsteadily through the anticipated self-denigration to preparedness for conjugal love:

> Why? Lord, why thus? Shall I in Question Call
> All my Relation to thyselfe? I know
> It is no Gay to please a Child withall
> But is the Ground whence Priviledges flow.
> Then ope the sluce: let some thing spoute on me.
> Then I shall in a better temper bee.
> (1.37.37-42)

The mind boggles a bit when it considers the many things that <u>might</u> "spoute" on Taylor in the context of this poem. The mixture of metaphors in this and like poems establishes numerous possibilities. In abstraction, of course, love or the grace of God is sought. More concretely: "breake thy Box of Ointment on my Head" (1.3.37), "Distill thy Spirit through thy royall Pipe / Into my Soule, and so my Spirits feed" (2.4.27-28), "Lord, let thy Love shine on my Soule! Mee Bath / In this Celestiall Gleame of this pure Love" (2.66.43-44), and "My Lord, distill these drops of Myrrh on mee, / If that thy lilly Lips drop on my heart / Thy passing myrrh, twill med'cine ev'ry part" (2.121.28-30). Each of these requests, and many more not catalogued, points to Taylor's readiness to receive the bridegroom, a state achieved only after a deliberate trek through a labyrinth of lines. As in poems employing the mask of an attendant to the feast, Taylor has begun as one unworthy of the Christ and concluded as one anxious to be joined to Him.

Chapter III
Taylor and the Metaphor of Union

How does one begin? How can he verbalize a union with God anticipated or perhaps once enjoyed? The problem is central to Taylor's Preparatory Meditations as it is to all poetry regarded mystical. It is one thing to chart the mystical journey through purgation and illumination, for these stations on the mystic's way partake of the sensate world; it is another thing to describe the potential or realized glories in God. Stace records the difficulties seen through the eyes of Plotinus, Eckhart, and several modern mystics:

> According to Plotinus, "the vision baffles telling." In a passage . . . Eckhart says that "the prophets walking in the light . . . sometimes were moved to teach us to know God. Whereupon they would fall dumb, becoming tongue-tied. . . . The Mystery they found there was ineffable." And modern Europeans and Americans who report having had mystical experiences feel the difficulty just as much as do the ancient or classical mystics. R. M. Bucke says that his experience was "impossible to describe." Tennyson says that his was "utterly beyond words." J. A. Symonds states that he "was not able to describe his experience to himself" and that he "could not find words to render it intelligible." Arthur Koestler says of his experience that "it was meaningful though

> not in verbal terms," and of his own attempts to describe it that "to communicate what is incommunicable by its nature one must somehow put it into words, and so one moves in a vicious circle."[1]

The dilemma, however, seems to prohibit few from trying (though haltingly) to convey their "moments of Truth." Dante can proclaim,

> Now will my words fall even shorter, in quest
> Of my remembrance, than the infant lore
> Of him whose tongue is moistened at the breast.
> Not that the Living Light I saw gave more
> Than one sole semblance to my contemplation,
> For it is always what it was before;
> But by my gathered strength of observation,
> One sole appearance, unto me thus seeing,
> Was ever changing with my transformation.
> To me within the luminous deep being
> Of Lofty Light appeared three circles, showing
> Three colours, and in magnitude agreeing;
> And from the First appeared the Second flowing
> Like Iris out of Iris, and the Third
> Seemed fire that equally from both is glowing.
> O but how scant, how feeble any word
> To my conceit! and this to what I viewed
> Is such, to call it little were absurd.
> O Light Eterne, who dost thyself include,
> Who lovest, smiling at thine own intents,
> Self-understanding and self-understood!
> That circling which in Thee seemed effluence
> Of light reverberated, by my view
> Surveyed awhile in its circumference,
> Within itself of its own proper hue
> Seemed painted with the effigy of man,
> Whereat my sight was wholly set thereto.
> As the geometer, intent to scan
> The measure of the circle, fails to trace,
> Think as he may, some feature of the plan,

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[1] W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 277-278.

Such I at the strange vision of the Face:
How the image fits the circle, fain aright
Would I perceive, and how it there finds place;
But my own wings were not for such a flight—
Except that, smiting through the mind of me,
There came fulfilment in a flash of light.
Here vigour failed the lofty fantasy;
But my volition now, and my desires.
Were moved like wheel revolving evenly
By Love that moves the sun and starry fires.[2]

St. John of the Cross can cry,

Un no se que que quedan balbuciendo.
A nameless "something" they keep stammering.[3]

The verse, which has become "famous for its triple repetition of the syllable que (obviously intentional), expresses most felicitously one stage in the real experience--a stage that must be excelled by poetry. The saint has found 'a most lofty understanding of God, which cannot be expressed, and for that reason is called a 'something.'"[4] To the credit of St. John, it can be said that he goes lyrically beyond the inadequate "something."

Though some might argue Taylor's ability to describe anything lyrically, few would quarrel with his ability to stammer, and that very well:

What is his Throne all Glory? Crown all Gay?
Crown all of Brightest Shine of Glory's Wealth?
This is a Lisp of Non-sense. I should say,
He is the Throne, and Crown of Glory 'tselfe.
Should Sun beams come to gilde his glory they
Would be as 'twere to gild the Sun with Clay.

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[2] Dante Alighieri, "Paradiso," The Divine Comedy, trans. Melville Best Anderson (New York, 1944), XXXIII, 106-145.

[3] Quoted in Jorge Guillén, Language and Poetry (Harvard University Press, 1961), p.99.

[4] Guillén, p. 99.

My Phancys in a Maze, my thoughts agast,
Words in an Extasy: my Telltale Tongue
Is Tonguetide, and my Lips are padlockt fast
To see thy Kingly Glory is to throng.
I can, yet cannot tell this Glory just,
In Silence bury't, must not, yet I must.
(1.17.7-18)

My Metaphors are but dull Tacklings tag'd
With ragged Non-Sense. Can such draw to thee
My stund affections all with Cinders clag'd,
If thy bright beaming headship touch not mee?
If that thy headship shines not in mine eyes,
My heart will fuddled ly with wordly toyes.

Lord play thy Excellency on this pin
To tongue ty other pleas my gadding heart
Is tooke withall. Chime my affections in
To serve thy Sacred selfe with Sacred art.
Oh! let thy Head stretch ore my heart its wing
And then my Heart thy Headships praise shall sing.
(2.36.31-42)

Words Mentall are syllabicated thoughts:
Words Orall but thoughts Whiffld in the Winde.
Words Writ, are incky, Goose quill-slabbred draughts,
Although the fairest blossoms of the minde.
Then can such glasses cleare enough descry
My Love to thee, or thy rich Deity?

Words are befould, Thoughts filthy fumes that smoake,
From Smutty Huts, like Will-a-Wisps that rise
From Quaugmires, run ore bogs where frogs do Croake,
Lead all astray led by them by the eyes.
My muddy Words so dark thy Deity.
And cloude thy Sun-Shine, and its Shining Sky.
(2.43.13-24)

Should I with silver tooles delve through the Hill
Of Cordilera for rich thoughts, that I
My Lord, might weave with an angelick skill
A Damask Web of Velvet Verse thereby
To deck thy Works up, all my Web would run
To rags, and jags: so snicksnarld to the thrum.
(2.56.1-6)

From "Lisp of Non-sense" and the tonguetide "Telltale Tongue" through "Tacklings tag'd / With ragged Non'Sense" and "snick-snarld" lines, Taylor stutters calculatedly toward God, moving in each instance to metaphors and complete poetic statements possessing greater (though not necessarily great) lyricism than the early sounds of frustration. Yet, the "Experience /of union sought or achieved/ is as far removed from expression 'as is a picture from a living person,'"[5] if one accepts Guillén's idea of the mystical experience and poetry. Awareness of one's inability (whether St. John's or Edward Taylor's) to describe the experience, in fact, precipitates the stammer. What lyricism ensues rises out of a poet's ability to create an experience like, but totally independent of, the experience; the expression will of necessity be based on words, images, and ideas of the human creature.[6] Thus, the metaphor of union.

More accurately, one must speak of multiple metaphors of union, for each mystical writer strives in a series of presentations to recreate the experience or conjure visions of what the experience must be like; in his efforts, he creates new poetic experiences, argues Guillén. At its best, the poetic statement represents imaginative and organically

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[5] Guillén, p. 93.
[6] Guillén, p. 101.

unified poetry. At a lower level of achievement, the expression labors toward its goal and lacks organicism. In most instances, whether the poetry is "successful" or "unsuccessful," the poet appears embarrassed by the inadequacy of his words.

Stace, though agreeing with Guillén that the poet exhibits concern at his feeble poetic efforts, sees the expression as a description of the experience itself (not a newly created experience).

> The words come from his mouth, but he is astonished and perplexed to find himself talking in contradictions. He explains this to himself by supposing that there is something wrong with the language. He says that his experience is ineffable.
>
> He is in fact mistaken. The paradox which he has uttered has correctly described his experience. The language is only paradoxical because the experience is paradoxical. Thus the language correctly mirrors the experience. But he had said first of his experience, "It is x." The next moment he finds himself compelled to say, "It is not-x." Hence he then supposes that his original statement "It is x" was wrong. And similarly if he began by saying, "It is not-x," and then afterward, "It is x," he supposes, when he makes the latter statement, that "It is not-x" was wrong. Thus whatever he says seems to him to have been incorrect since he always has to contradict it. Thereupon he blames the language.[7]

Whether one accepts Guillén's "new poetic experience" or Stace's expression of "the thing itself" is of little importance, for even Stace speaks of language that "correctly mirrors [my

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[7] Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 305.

emphasis7 the experience," thereby thrusting him into the world of images.

Clearly, Taylor holds the expression of union to be metaphoric. In his sermon based on Colossians 2:9 and associated with "Meditation 2.46," Taylor explains the God/man union in the person of Jesus to his congregation, employing accommodative language.

> For the Fulness of the Godhead dwells not in the Manhood properly as in an House ut res Contenta in Contenenti, for then the Manhood must not be onely Co-extended with Godhead, but Ultra-extended, and stretcht out farther than the Godhead. For that house is an house of Little ease unto its inhabitant that sits as tite to him as the Cloaths on his back, and yet the Cloaths in their extent exceed the limits of the Body. But the Speech is Metaphoricall: and imports the most intimate, and excellent Hypostaticall Union of the Godhead and Manhood of Christ together.[8]

In this brief segment of the sermon, Taylor extends the idea of "dwells," taken from Colossians 2:9,[9] to its logical complement "House." But understanding the paradox of Jesus' being at once equal to and greater than God in theological and spatial terms, Taylor concludes that the language is metaphorical. The sublime union of Godhead and Manhood in Jesus can be represented only in metaphor, and even that with less than complete effectiveness.

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[8] Edward Taylor, Christographia, ed. Norman S. Grabo (New Haven, 1962), pp. 150-151.

[9] "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Prior to delivering his sermon on the fullness of the Godhead in Christ, dated May 10, 1702, Taylor struggled with the doctrine in verse:

> I drown, my Lord. What though the Streame I'm in
> Rosewater bee, Or ocean to its brinkes
> Of Aqua Vitae where the Ship doth Swim?
> (2.46.1-3)

He later cries, "Thy Fulness, Lord my Filberd cannot hold" (2.46.7). Though the drowning and concern over one's inability to contain the Lord suggest Taylor's own desires for God, they also point to his inability to comprehend or express in logical terms, the God/man union of fullness of God in Christ. The poem continues then, of necessity, as a series of metaphoric comparisons. Metaphor upon metaphor sets Taylor's inability to contain the fullness of the Lord against Jesus' ability to hold the completeness of the Godhead: (1) how can a rose leaf contain the sun? (2) how can an ant's eggs canopy the sky? To be compared with the Lord's ability to (1) possess all excellence as a palace might possess it, (2) enjoy all kinds and quantities of spices residing in Him, and (3) receive precious stones brightly set into the cabinet of His body. The poem concludes with Taylor's determined plea, very nearly the Donnean demand, for union, and this, too, in metaphoric terms:

Oh! what a Lord and Lordship's here my Lord?
How doth thy Fulness, fill thy Hall with Shine?
Some Rayes thereof my Cottage now afford
And let these golden rayes its inside line.
Thy Fulness all, or none at all, Will goe
Together, and in part will never flow.

All, Lord, or None at all! this make mee dread.
All is so Good, and None at all so bad.
All puts faith to't: but none at all strikes dead.
I'le hope for all, lest none at all makes sad.
Hold up this hope. Lord, then this hope shall sing
Thy praises sweetly, spite of feares Sad Sting.
(2.46.25-36)

Taylor comes full circle, returning to the diction of the scripture to be "opened" in his sermon of May 10, having employed the only type of language adequate to the expression of what is at least logically inexpressible.

In this poem, however, and in essentially all of Taylor's Meditations, discomfort with even metaphoric language is readily apparent. Taylor seems all too keenly aware of the inappropriateness of words to the experience, driving doggedly through metaphor after metaphor toward the concluding stanzas suggesting union, only to find that this, of all "time" in poetry, is the most difficult to account for. It is, in fact, timelessness in the non-sensate world. But Taylor longs in each meditation for this "moment," which he anticipates shall occur outside the poem upon his celebration of the feast. He longs for the Christ, and the longing precipi-

tates an impressive body of figurative language expressive of union.

The Guest at the Feast: Union in the Ingestive Metaphor

There seems no very complete way to discuss Taylor's figurative language in a work of this scope, for many of the figures possess an extensive literary and philosophical history demanding an exhaustive and, I am certain, exhausting study. Even the matter of organizing a discussion poses its problems, owing primarily to Taylor's penchant for spinning off metaphor after metaphor under a plan to which, at times, only he and God seemed privy. The work is somewhat less demanding, however, than a full-scale study of metaphor might be, for our concern centers on the figures of union, the concluding moments of anticipation in the Meditations. And each poem in the Meditations, almost without exception, is a poem of anticipation, calculated to bring the poet through the agonies of purgation and shattering of self into the presence of God. Only then is the guest to the feast prepared to eat; only then is the bride prepared for the bridegroom.

It is imperative, of course, that one return to Taylor's dramatic settings for the poems; they serve to dictate, in most instances, the nature of the concluding figures of union.

The guest who earlier had banqueted with Satan or who had perhaps looked with disdain or fear upon the delicacies placed before him by God now relishes (Taylor's wit eventually warps even the worst of us) the Bread of Life. And the betrothed who doubted her worthiness to be joined to the Lord now approaches Him with an air of confidence. Our immediate concern is the feast itself and the manner in which it contributes to the idea of union, though it will become apparent soon that the "sweets" of the banquet are not to be categorized wholly apart from the "delicacies" enjoyed in sexual love, any more than the idea of feast should be separated from the idea of wedding. The celebration is, after all, a wedding feast, one in which man and God can be joined.

Dramatically, the guests have looked upon the feast with varying emotions: a degree of disdain owing to simple lack of appetite, fear of one's own inability to genuinely taste (having eaten so long at the table of Satan), and an intense desire to eat countered by the belief that one is unworthy. Each of these obstacles (apparently differing states of mind Taylor experienced) is overcome at the conclusion of the poems and the food sought:

What wonder's here, that Bread of Life should come
To feed Dead Dust? Dry Dust eate Living Bread?
Yet Wonder more by far many all, and some
That my Dull Heart's so dumpish when thus fed.
Lord Pardon this, and feed mee all my dayes,
With Living Bread to thy Eternall Prayse.
(1.9.31-36)

It's first daye's Mess Disht up in Heavenly Dew.
Lord feede mee all wayes with't: it will enable
Mee much to live up to thy praise anew.
Angells delight, attending on this table.
If on this Angell fare I'm fed, I shall
Sing forth thy glory with bright Angells all.
(2.60[A]43-48)

Then let thy Sweetspike sweat its liquid Dew
Into my Crystall Viall: and there swim.
And as thou at thy Table in Rich Shew
With royal Dainties, sweet discourse as King
Dost Welcome thine. My Spiknard with its Smell
Shall vapour out perfumed Spirits Well.

Whether I at thy Table Guest do sit,
And feed my tast: or Wait, and fat mine Eye
And Eare with Sights and Sounds, Heart Raptures fit,
My Spicknard breaths its sweet perfumes with joy.
My heart thy Viall with this spicknard fill.
Perfumed praise to thee then breath it will.
(2.62.19-30)

But in what manner is this feast with its complementary ingestive metaphors indicative of Taylor's mystical longing for God? Taylor answers most capably, describing the nature of the feast characterized in the Meditations and later enjoyed in fact outside the poem.

> Consider the magnificence of the wedden [sic] that thou art bound to attend . . . Here is a feast that's a feast indeed. It excels the most sumptuous and magnificent feast of the

> most magnificent monarch that ever breathed on earth. The guests are saints sparklingly adorned in the vestments of glorifying grace. The waiters are the all gloriously holy angels of light. The authors, the everlasting King of Glory, The occasion, the wedden and marriage of His only Son, to his bride the souls of His elect, the church of the first born whose names are written in heaven. And the entertainment itself, and this is most rich and royal, the Manna of heaven, angels' bread, the bread of life, the water of life, the fruits of "the Tree of Life in the middest of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). Spiritual dainties: Oh! the sweet heart-ravishing melodies, musics, and songs of a spiritual nature with which Christ entertains souls hereat, what tongue of man or angel is able to relate?[10]

Were one not certain the description was of the Lord's Supper, he might be inclined to believe the attendant to the feast had suddenly been transported bodily to Heaven: (1) it is a feast surpassing any ever experienced "on earth," (2) the guests are saints waited on by angels, and (3) the food is the Son of God (i.e., "Manna of heaven," "angels' bread," "bread of life," and the "water of life").[11] The transportation is, in fact, mystical. Whatever "spatial distance" has existed between God and the communicant prior to the feast ceases to exist in the celebration of the feast, and the experience disallows

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[10] Edward Taylor, Edward Taylor's Treatise Concerning the Lord's Supper, ed. Norman S. Grabo (Michigan State Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 179-180.

[11] See John 6:48-51, Psalms 78:25, and John 4:5-14.

recounting, not at all unlike the mystical moment described by the apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians.[12] The suggestion is apparent: when one, properly prepared, of course, eats of this delicacy, he is one with God, having consumed Him.

The tradition is longstanding, certainly not at all new with Taylor. Nicolas James Perella, in The Kiss Sacred and Profane, comments on the line between the idea of mystical union and eucharistic observance, a matter fully developed and documented in his expansive work.

> The Eucharistic-bridal union is in fact a frequent thought in Christian writers. Without seeking to multiply examples, we may note that one of the most ecstatic waxings on the Eucharist as a marital union between the communicant and Jesus Christ occurs in the works of Bossuet. The eating of the God-man is a marriage in body and spirit between bride and Bridegroom. . . .Bossuet explains the bridal-alimentary image of eating and assimilating the Host by an analogy with the rage of human lovers who seek desperately to unite in an embrace and kiss that have an anthropophagic quality and intent.[13]

Bossuet, the twelfth-century French bishop quite apparently sees the uniting rite in terms of images and like Taylor, at moments, fuses the ingestive and sexual metaphors:

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[12] II Corinthians 12:1-4. Most important in this incident are the facts that one is caught up into paradise and disallowed or finds himself incapable of uttering the account.

[13] Nicolas James Perella, The Kiss Sacred and Profane (Berkeley, 1969), p. 287, n.84.

> In the ecstasy of human love, who is unaware that we eat and devour each other, that we long to become part of each other in every way, and, as the poet said, to carry off even with our teeth the thing we love in order to possess it, feed upon it, become one with it, live on it? That which is frenzy, that which is impotence in corporeal love is truth, is wisdom in the love of Jesus: "Take, eat, this is my body": devour swallow up not a part, not a piece but the whole.[14]

One consumes, but one also consummates. The two worlds of expression are so inextricably tangled that images clustering about the idea of ingestive union likewise cluster about the idea of sexual union.

Taylor often attempts no clear delineation between the two expressions of union, not, I believe, because he is incapable of doing so, but rather because a more encompassing sense of union is achieved frequently in ambiguity. "Grace in thy Lips poured out's as Liquid Gold. / Thy Bottle make my Soule, Lord, it to hold" (1.7.17-18) may be seen as a cry for living water or a plea for the sensual kiss prefatory to the sexual act. "O let thy lovely streams of Love distill / Upon myselfe and spoute their spirits pure / Into my Viall . . ." (2.32.49-51) may be understood as Taylor's call for the draught of love (the wine of the Lord's Supper) or desire for an

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[14] Perella, p. 3.

erotic/spiritual infusion.

Even more intricate in its imagery suggesting union is "Meditation 126." In its concluding stanzas, Taylor again seeks oneness with God, crying "Lord, make my Palates Constitution right / Like to thy Palates Constitution fine" (2.126.37-38). By the end of the plea, the palate of the Lord is essentially the palate of Taylor. Even the heart and lungs of each seem one functioning unit.

> Then what shall to thy tast be sweet indeed
> Shall be most sweet unto my tast likewise.
> What bitter to thy Palate doth proceed
> Shall to my Palate bitter up arise.
> Thy Hearts sweet steame that doth thy Palate greet
> Will make my Tast with thy heart Sweetness sweet.
>
> Those Hony falls that in thy heart rise high
> Of Grace, and through the pipes of pure Lungs
> Are brought into thy mouths bright Canopy
> And on my Garden herbs are shower'd in throngs
> Will sweeten all my flowers and herbs therein
> And make my Winde Pipe thy sweet praises sing.
> (2.126.43-54)

The ingestive metaphor is obvious enough, and the sexual becomes so through its connection with Canticles 5:16, on which the poem and successive sermon is based. In the passage the Christ (the person Taylor believed described) is characterized as possessing a mouth "most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."[15] Perella sees in the language of the Song of

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[15] Canticles 5:16.

Songs, and by our extension Taylor's "Meditation 126," sexual love play leading to consummation.

> The innumerable references of poets to taste imagery (the most common allusion is to honey, which is both sweet and nutritious) in the matter of their ladies' kisses constitute an eloquent proof [regarding the link between the tactile kiss and eating], even after we have made allowances for poetic fancy and the fact that the tactile sensations involved in lovers' kisses are sometimes overwhelming in themselves. Where the gustatory sensations are more apt to be in evidence is in the passionate buccolingual kiss in which the tongue plays an active part. In the Song of Songs (4:11) we read: "Thy lips drip as the honeycomb, my spouse: / Honey and milk are under thy tongue."[16]

In "Meditation 126" Taylor enjoys the taste of honey only as his mouth and the Lord's become one. Sweetness rises from Jesus' heart to his mouth and is conveyed to Taylor in the spiritual kiss. The honey presumably falls (as it has risen in Jesus) through the digestive system to Taylor's heart and there gives life to the garden of the soul.[17] The action is simultaneously physiological and erotic.

Taylor introduces an impressive array of dainties to be tasted (i.e., "liquours," "mints," "Bread of Life," "sweets," "nectar," "roastmeat," "fruits," "pomegranate," "nuts," "ambrosia," and a variety of "spices"), but it is not my

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[16] Perella, p. 2.

[17] It is additionally of interest that the garden frequently serves as a female figure. See J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. Jack Sage (New York, 1962), p. 110.

intention to catalogue items, providing a menu. Each item functions in essentially the same fashion, serving to represent either the Lord Himself or an attribute He possesses, and by its ingestion one contains the fullness of Christ.

The Betrothed at the Feast: Union in the Sexual Metaphor

In numerous other meditations, Taylor delineates the dramatic setting more carefully, disallowing his reader to "run with a metaphor": the proposed and anticipated union is explicitly sexual. In reference to the God/man marriage, Taylor cries,

> Oh! that thy Love might overflow my Heart!
> To fire the same with Love: for Love I would.
> But oh! my streight'ned Breast! my Lifeless Sparke!
> My Fireless Flame! What Chilly Love, and Cold?
> In measure small! In Manner Chilly! See.
> Lord blow the Coal: Thy Love Enflame in mee.
> (1.1.13-18)

> Hence, Oh! my Lord, make thou mee thine that so
> I may be bed wherein thy Love shall ly,
> And be thou mine that thou mayest ever show
> Thyselfe the Bed my Love its lodge may spy,
> Then this shall be the burden of my Song
> My Well belov'de is mine: I'm his become.
> (2.79.67-72)

In "Meditation 119" Taylor focuses carefully on the Bridegroom's eyes, quite apparently from the Bride's point of view. The eyes are seen as "loveliness," "percing," "Dove like," and "Charming."

And the concluding stanzas, when union is sought, introduce a sexual playfulness in the "Glancing Eyes" of the Lord, all preparatory to but suggestive of the sexual act.

> Look here, my Soule, thy Saviours Eye most brisk
> Doth glaze and make't most Charming beauty weare
> That Ever Heaven held or ever kisst.
> All Saints, and Angells at it Gastard stare.
> This Eye with all the beauties in his face
> Doth hold thy heart and Love in a blesst Chase.
>
> Lord let these Charming Glancing Eyes of thine
> Glance on my Souls bright Eye its amorous beams
> To fetch as upon golden Ladders fine
> My Heart and Love to thee in Hottest Steams.
> Which bosom'd in thy brightest beauty cleare
> Shall tune the glances of thy Eyes Sweet Deare.
> (2.119.19-30)

The interlaced eyebeams, not at all new to the reader of Renaissance poetry, are broadened to encompass the Neoplatonic theory and its accompanying figure, the ladder of love, "which regards the beauty of the human creature as a way to rise to the contemplation of the Creator."[18] As Taylor employs the figure, the mingled eyebeams shall serve in time as a ladder while somewhat inconsistently the Lord's "Charming Glancing Eyes" additionally fasten upon and lift the waiting Bridegroom to his bosom.

The eyes are most important to the metaphor of sexual union, for they are said by some Medieval writers

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[18] Perella, p. 184.

> to be superior /to the lips or kiss/, on the grounds that the sweetness that lovers derive from gazing into each other's eyes is both purer and more complete, or, we may say, more spiritual than that which comes through the lips. The reason for this is that the eyes are themselves the most spiritual of the senses and thus constitute a pure passageway for love; the sweetness that is conveyed by them moves swiftly and directly to the heart. Nonetheless, although the gazing into each other's eyes is judged the more truly perfect joy of love (inasmuch as it permits the lovers to pass into each other's heart), . . . the kiss may be a seal or warranty that the lover is experiencing that perfect joy.[19]

Clearly, in "Meditation 119" the eyes suggest an immediate means to mystical ascent and ultimate union.

"Meditation 134" further characterizes the explicitly sexual setting for union. The scene is very like the evening of nuptial love in which a speaker looks to the Bride (and for Taylor the Bride denotes the church generally and Taylor particularly), describing her as properly prepared for a night of ecstasy. All is ready:

> Thy Beauty is made of Heavenly Paint all Grace
> Of Sanctity Holy Within and Out
> A Bride most bright for the King of Glorys face
> Whose beauty laid in Heavenly Colours about
> That ravish doth the Eyes of Angells which
> Can't but gaze on't and all amaizd at it pitch.

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[19] Perella, p. 125.

> And lest perchance any wrinckle on it light
> Or any freckle on thy beautious face
> The Silk and Satin Robes, than milk more white
> Oh Christ's own Righteousness o're all hath place.
> Hence all thy Beauty fits thee for Christ's Bed
> And he will Cover thee with's White and Red.
> (2.134.31-42)

The Bride has proven herself worthy of heavenly cosmetics and enjoys now a beauty that provokes even the angels to the edge of lust. Her careful preparation, however, has been for the bed of the Christ as she has slipped into robes of silk and satin. Outside the poem, and mystically beyond time, she shall lie beneath her Lord in sexual union, covered by His purity and love.

Numerous poems in the Meditations serve the theme of mystical union through the sexual metaphor; some however suggest no dramatically unified action and surprise the reader with an abruptly posed statement possessing sexual overtones or explicit sexuality. In these situations, Taylor demands much from his reader, requiring that he leap from the "Golden City" of heaven with walls of jasper into the "Wedden Garment" of the Lord's spouse (1.23), from the feeding of the five thousand to a scene surreal in which Taylor becomes the love couch for Jesus (1.35), from blushing Marigolds and "apple shells" to eyes

impregnated "with a Sparke Divine" (2.3). And to such imaginative leaps there is almost no end, even as there is almost no end to sexual referents (e.g., "ravishment," "brambles" suggestive of adulterous love, "True-Love Knots,"[20] Taylor "In heate and Zeale" to the Lord, and "true Love's Mines" requiring digging).

Broadening the base for the sexual metaphor of union, Taylor employs the mystically traditional love-wound motif, replete with a lover's stinging/stabbing effect on the speaker, a concomitant death, and restoration by the application of an appropriate balm. The tradition has its roots in early Christian martyrdom, soon finding its way into the literature of the Western mystics: "The same principle of ecstatic love operates in the two groups as they seek death, secure in the words of St. Paul, 'Where then, Death, is thy sting?' (I Cor. 15:55), and anxious to return the love of Christ by an act of self-immolation. In choosing love, the mystic, like the martyr, chooses to die."[21]

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[20] Several possibilities emerge from the figure of the knot; however, Taylor seems to employ it to suggest at one moment entanglement with the devil (not unlike his use of the bramble bush) or "pure connection" in the God/man union. See J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 164-5; 182-3. Also Richard Cavendish, The Black Arts (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1967), p. 17.

[21] Perella, p. 63.

In Taylor's Meditations, the death is to self and sounds very like sexual intercourse (as one might expect, understanding the long literary relationship between death and copulation).

> I am asham'd to say I love thee do.
> But dare not for my Life, and Soule deny't.
> Yet wonder much Love's Springs should lie so low
> Thy loveliness its Object shines so bright.
> Shall all the Beams of Love upon me shine?
> And shall my Love Love's Object still make me pine?
>
> I'me surely made a Gazing Stock to all.
> The Holy Angells Wonder: and the Mock
> Of Divells (pining that they misse it all)
> To see these beams gild me a Stupid Stock.
> Thy Argument is good, Lord point it, come
> Let't lance my heart, till True Loves Veane doth run.
> (1.36.61-72)

Taylor's call is for "the Beams of Love," the divine Argument, to pierce the heart; but the Argument or Word, for Taylor, is in fact the Christ. The suggestion is clear then that the Word pierces the vital but evil heart, slaying self; but simultaneously infuses new life, giving birth to Self.

> But that here is a Crevice for one hope
> To creep in, and this Message to Convay
> That I am thine, makes me refresh, Lord ope
> The Doore so wide that Love may Scip, and play.
> My Spirits then shall dance thy Praise. I'me thine.
> And Present things with things to come are mine.
> (1.36.73-78)

Of importance also is the collapsing of time in line seventy-eight; when union is effected, the present and future give way to a timelessness.

"Meditation 49" of Taylor's second series continues the love-wound motif, though the wound is not fatal. It is sought, however, and is representative of Taylor's longing for the Lord and denial of self in a moment of agonizing joy.

> But woe is mee. Unclean I am: my Slips!
> Lord, let a Seraphim a live Coale take
> Off of thine Altar, with it touch my lips.
> And purge away my Sins for Mercys sake.
> I thus do pray finding thy Cask within
> With Grace, and graces fulness fild to th'brim.
> (2.49.25-30)

Union is achieved as the fiery coal from the Lord's altar touches Taylor's lips. The coal becomes an extension of the Lord Himself, and Taylor cries," . . . Thou art my lovely marke" (2.49.40). As in each meditation, the union can only be anticipated now. It shall be realized outside the poem.

Many other metaphors suggesting union recur throughout the Meditations, and though they do not participate directly in the controlling idea of the wedding feast, they clearly demonstrate and reinforce Taylor's mystical yearnings for the Lord already discussed. Some of the figures can be broadly classified as figures concerned with the idea of enclosure: "Open thy Rosie Leaves, and lodge mee there" (1.4.60), "Open thy garden doore: mee entrance give" (2.63.53), and "Oh! Graft me in this Tree of Life within / The Paradise of God, that I may live" (1.33.37-38). In each

instance, the suggestion is that Taylor seeks an overwhelming of self in the Lord, for the rose of "Meditation 4" is the Rose of Sharon or Christ, even as the Tree of Life and garden are Christ.

Other meditations seek, not that one be admitted, enclosed, and dissolved into another but rather that the Lord actively introduce Himself into His waiting servant, Taylor.

> A Lock of Steel upon my Soule, whose key
> The serpent keeps, I fear, doth lock my doore.
> O pick't: and through the key-hole make thy way
> And enter in: and let thy joyes run o're.
> (1.49.7-10)

And certainly the Lord's "royal pipe," sought by Taylor's heart and from which all types of blessing pour into the heart, is indicative of the desire for the unitive way; for it is essentially the introduction of all that Christ is into the prepared soul.

Descending and rising flames, traditionally mystical, serve Taylor well. "Meditation 1" of the first series describes Taylor's longings as feeble sparks, aspiring to but incapable of leaping to God. He pleads for an enflaming of his soul that the fire of God might spread, consume, and give life to a new and more intense love. "Meditation 12" of the same series records a similar experience with the familiar mystical plaint:

My Lovely One, I fain would love thee much
But all my Love is none at all I see,
Oh! let thy Beauty give a glorious tuch
Upon my Heart, and melt to Love all mee.
Lord melt me all up into Love for thee
Whose Loveliness excells what love can bee.
(1.13.43-48)

The old self would be melted and a new Self created in Love. Stace comments on this idea from the mystic's point of view, calling it the "experience of 'melting away' into the Infinite of one's own individuality" and arguing that "Such phrases as 'melting away,' 'fading away,' 'passing away' are found in the mystical literature of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism."[22]

Taylor's variation on the theme of union seem almost as multitudinous as the blessing he sees pouring from God's cornucopia, and perhaps Taylor calculated it so. How else, if not through many and varied attempts, can one approach the ineffable? Complete and sustained silence upon the bliss of an ultimate experience would be unthinkable for the poet, preacher, and Christian mystic.

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[22] Walter T. Stace, The Teachings of the Mystics (New York, 1960), p. 24.

Chapter IV
Taylor and the Glories of Union

Few poems in the Meditations so successfully capture the essence of Taylor's pleas as "Meditation 47" of the second series. Few so clearly delineate the nature of his meditative and mystical search for the One, or its implications.

> I strike mine oare not in the golden Sea
> Of Godhead Fulness, thine essentially.
> But in the Silver Ocean make my way
> Of All Created Fulness, thine Most high.
> Thy Humane Glass, God wondrously did build:
> And Grace oreflowing, with All fulness Filld.
> (2.47.7-12)

The journey, which begins somewhat less than gloriously (even fearfully), continues through stages of glory. Beginning in self-doubt, it ends in Self-assurance. The broken "Chrystall Glass" (1.31) in the earliest stage of the journey becomes "Thy Humane Glass, God wondrously did build" (suggestive of the miraculous mending of mind/heart in Christ's sacrificial offering and effected by Taylor's willingness to be mended). The way is to awareness or realization, and understanding that

lifts one from a blackened ocean of self-denigration and places him in the "Silver Ocean" of "Created Fulness." Part of the journey demands that Taylor (the prepared communicant) realize his own worth, that God has bestowed upon him above all created beings (in the person of Jesus) "Grace oreflowing." But even this glory realized gives place to another greater: though Taylor bathes in the ocean of silver now, he has within him the potential to bathe "in the golden Sea / Of Godhead Fulness."

> Thou dost all Fulness of all Life possess.
> Thy Life all varnisht is with virdent flowers
> 'Bove Sense and Reason in their brightest dress.
> Lifes best top gallant ever in thee towers.
> The Life of Grace that Life of Life within
> Thy knot in heavenly Sparks is flourishing.
>
> Besides thy proper Lifes tall fulness--Wealth,
> There's Life in thee, like golden Spirits, stills,
> To ery member of thy Mystick Selfe,
> Through secret Chases into th'vitall tills
> Or like the Light embodi'd in the Sun
> That to each living thing with life doth run.
> (2.47.13-24)

The fullness now envisioned within Taylor's "grasp" is not a silvery "Created Fulness" but golden "Godhead Fulness." The life and death of Jesus offer "tall fulness-Wealth," but there is more: life within Life, the luxuriant washing to be received outside "Sense and Reason." And Taylor cries in prospect of the ultimate experience:

Lord, bath mee in this Well of Life. This Dew
Of Vitall Fruite will make mee ever live.
My branch make green: my Rose ware vivid hew
And Holy and a fragrant sent out give.
My kirnell ripe shall rattle out thy praise
And Orient blush shall on my actions blaze.
(2.47.31-36)

Clearly, the Meditations characterize more than mere preparation for a ritual observance. Taylor seeks the taste of wine and bread, but more significant is the fact that he seeks to be united again and again with God in the ultimate mystical experience.

Again and Again: "The Experience"

To this point we have considered Taylor's Meditations, on the whole, as tripartite-structured efforts in the direction of mystical ascent: purgation, illumination, and union. The discussion of union, however, has centered on anticipation; for almost without exception the concluding stanzas of each meditation point to a time outside the poem when the unitive way will be "real." One might legitimately ask whether Taylor ever encountered God in fact. Did he only anticipate and never realize? A question of this sort is fraught with problems. How, after all, can anyone determine with any degree of certainty the realness or quality of another's experience? And what is real? I intend no judgments along this line of

questioning. I know only that Taylor believed his experience real and that the Meditations are grounded in the expectation that he shall find and join God again and again as he had before.

There is no possible way of knowing how many times Taylor believed he encountered God in mystical union: perhaps as many times as he went to the Table of the Lord, but he provides no tally sheet. Two poems in his series of meditations, however, confirm his participation on at least one and perhaps more occasions in the consummate act: "The Reflexion" and "The Experience."

"The Reflexion" begins not very differently from the other meditations. Taylor sits in dejection at the Lord's Table, bemoaning the possibility he will not see God or enjoy His blessings outpoured in union:

> Shall I not smell thy sweet, oh! Sharons Rose?
> Shall not mine Eye salute thy Beauty? Why?
> Shall thy sweet leaves their Beautious sweets upclose?
> As halfe ashamde my sight should on them ly?
> Woe's me! for this my sighs shall be in grain
> Offer'd on Sorrows Altar for the same.
>
> Had not my Soule's thy Conduit, Pipes stopt bin
> With mud, what Ravishment would'st thou Convay?
> Let Graces Golden Spade dig till the Spring
> Of tears arise, and cleare this filth away.
> Lord, let thy spirit raise my sighings till
> These Pipes my soule do with thy sweetness fill.
> (Refl. ll. 7-18)

The cries are the agonies and the uncertainties of purgation,

precisely what one comes to expect at this juncture in the poem. The suggestions of the next two stanzas, however, defeat one's anticipations. Instead of variations on the theme of Taylor's worthlessness, the reader sees God momentarily through Taylor's reminiscent eyes:

> Earth once was Paradise of Heaven below
> Till inkefac'd sin had it with poyson stockt
> And Chast this Paradise away into
> Heav'ns upmost Loft, and it in Glory Lockt.
> But thou, sweet Lord, has with thy golden Key
> Unlockt the Doore, and made, a golden day.
>
> Once at thy Feast, I saw thee Pearle-like stand
> 'Tween Heaven, and Earth where Heavens Bright glory all
> In streams fell on thee, as a floodgate and,
> Like Sun Beams through thee on the World to Fall.
> Oh! sugar sweet then! my Deare sweet Lord, I see
> Saints Heavens-lost Happiness restor'd by thee.
> (Refl. ll. 19-30)

Line twenty-three initiates the reflections, the word "But" signaling the mind's return to another day "Once at thy Feast."

It was here that the Lord was seen standing between heaven and earth, bathed in the brightness of His own glory; and were it not for the concluding two lines of stanza five (ll. 29-30), one might conclude that Taylor had stood only in contemplation of his master. However, the brief, ejaculatory expression and the description of the Lord in ingestive language preclude mere contemplation. This is a moment of mystical union.

The moment is recollected now in an effort somehow to recall the Lord, and the meditation concludes with Taylor's usual plea for oneness in God:

> Shall not thy Rose my Garden fresh perfume?
> Shall not thy Beauty my dull Heart assaile?
> Shall not thy golden gleams run through this gloom?
> Shall my black Velvet Mask thy fair Face Vaile?
> Pass o're my Faults: shine forth, bright sun: arise
> Enthrone thy Rosy-selfe within mine Eyes.
> (Refl. 11. 37-42)

The experience, with its streams of light and unrestricted vision, demands comparison with many similar mystical accounts. But few enjoy such explicit kinship as Henry Vaughan's "The World": "I Saw Eternity the other night / Like a great Ring of pure and endless light, . . ."[1] Like Taylor, who moves almost imperceptibly in and out of tenses--thereby denying time, Vaughan seizes eternity in a moment. Such is the nature of the ultimate experience.

But the moment of rapture seems and is perhaps only that, a moment. It cannot be sustained, and Taylor is painfully aware of his inability to grasp this ecstatic timelessness over any prolonged period. Out of this realization grows "The Experience." The poem is another record of Taylor's

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[1] Henry Vaughan, "The World," The Complete Poetry of Henry Vaughan, ed. French Fogle (Garden City, New York, 1964). p. 231.

encounter and union with God, referring perhaps to the moment cited in "The Reflexion" or another occasion:[2]

> Oh! that I always breath'd in such an aire,
> As I suckt in, feeding on sweet Content!
> Disht up unto my Soul ev'n in that pray're
> Pour'de out to God over last Sacrament.
> What Beam of Light wrapt up my sight to finde
> Me neerer God than ere Came in my minde?
> (Exper. ll. 1-6)

Whenever the occasion of this experience, it was in a moment of prayer "over last Sacrament" and produced a fleeting rapture of the eye and mind, involving eventually a union with the Lord:

> Most strange it was! But yet more strange that shine
> Which filld my Soul then to the brim to spy
> My Nature with thy Nature all Divine
> Together joyn'd in Him thats Thou, and I.
> Flesh of my Flesh, Bone of my Bone. There's run
> Thy Godhead, and my Manhood in thy Son.
> (Exper. ll. 7-12)

Strange (out of the ordinary) it is. Certainly it cannot be seen as a part of the workaday world, for God and Taylor "dissolve" into the person of Jesus, allowing Taylor to claim God and His son as "Flesh of my Flesh, Bone of my Bone."[3] It

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[2] Because neither "The Reflexion" nor "The Experience" is dated and because neither poem specifies the date of the occasion, it is impossible to determine whether the same or a different mystical experience is described in each poem.

[3] When this poetic line is set against its scriptural background (Genesis 2:23-34), the implications become far-reaching. Taylor and God are "one flesh," good cause for Taylor's claim that he stands nearer God than the angels (Exper. ll. 18-24).

should also be noted that the occasion is "strange" because, though a recurring one, it is ever new. As in "The Reflexion," the recollection stirs a plea for yet another experience:

> Oh! that that Flame which thou didst on me Cast
> Might me enflame, and lighten ery where.
> Then Heaven to me would be less at last
> So much of heaven I should have while here.
> Oh! Sweet though Short! Ile not forget the same.
> My neerness, Lord, to thee did me Enflame.
> (Exper. ll. 13-18)

The plea, in the character of the experience, bends the "orthodox" Christian plea (when one sees orthodoxy as a call for an afterlife with God). It is a request that God encircle Taylor again in "a great Ring of pure and endless light." To be sure, he desires "Heaven . . . at last," but a more immediate and living desire is that Heaven "be less at last" and more now. His intense longing and recollection of a moment in God causes him to demand of the angels:

> I'le Claim my Right: Give place, ye Angells Bright.
> Ye further from the Godhead stande than I.
> My Nature in your Lord; and doth Unite
> Better than Yours unto the Deity.
> Gods Throne is first and mine is next: to you
> Only the place of Waiting-men is due.
> (Exper. ll. 19-24)

Ordering the angels about might seem pompous and more than a bit surprising, given Taylor's historical setting: the traditional order of things is disturbed (i.e., Taylor's being made much higher than the angels instead of a little lower than the

angels). But the demand must be understood almost literally "in the light" of an experience in which Taylor is enthroned next to God. All who cannot be united with Him must be relegated to the positions of servants. Ironically, the man Taylor becomes a god, and angelic beings become "Waiting-men."

The pride issuing out of a former experience, however, collapses to a pining for another in the concluding stanza:

> Oh! that my Heart, thy Golden Harp might bee
> Well tun'd by Glorious Grace, that e'ry string
> Screw'd to the highest pitch, might unto thee
> All Praises wrapt in sweetest Musick bring.
> I praise thee, Lord, and better praise thee would
> If what I had, my heart might ever hold.
> (Exper. ll. 25-30)

The mystical moment can never be held, but it can be sought and attained again and again. And from each successful search a godlike glory emerges.

A Perennial Glory

Taylor clearly participates, with his godlike pride upon union, in a broad-based tradition, sharing ideas and language with mystics before and after him. It is no wonder that Taylor often sounds very like Henry Vaughan, or even further removed from his milieu, Plotinus; each seeks to return to the Source of all beings (Pure Being) through repeated mystical ascents:

> We then hasten to leave from here below and regret
> the chains which bind us to other things, in order
> so to embrace the real object of our love by our

> whole being that no part of us is not in contact with it. Then one can see it and oneself, as far as it is permitted to see. One sees oneself shining brilliantly, filled with intelligible light. Or rather one is oneself pure light, that is, subtle and weightless. One has become divine, or rather one is part of the eternal Being of the divine that is beyond becoming. In this condition one is like a flame; but if later one is weighted down again by the sense world, one is like a light that is extinguished.[4]

Were it not specified that these are the words of Plotinus, one might believe them to be the words of Taylor. In them exist the same fear of being bound to things base, the desire to embrace (as in the passion of physical love) the purest of love and/or lovers, the call for sight/insight, the brilliance of a non-sensate experience, and the realization with a degree of pride that one has become or is divine.

Aldous Huxley, in his seminal work The Perennial Philosophy, explains the kinship I have described:

> Philosophia perennis--the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing--the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being--the thing is immemorial and universal. Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditionary lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the

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[4] Quoted in Joseph Katz, The Philosophy of Plotinus (New York, 1950), p. 155.

> higher religions. A version of this Highest Common Factor in all preceding and subsequent theologies was first committed to writing more than twenty-five centuries ago, and since that time the inexhaustible theme has been treated again and again, from the standpoint of every religious tradition and in all the principal languages of Asia and Europe.[5]

A similar impulse among a broad spectrum of writers then accounts for similar and, in some instances, identical themes and language. In regard to the theme of purgation, Taylor can sound very like the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing: "Look up now, weak and wretched man, and see what you are. What are you, and what have you done to deserve to be called by the Lord? What weary wretched heart asleep in laziness can help but be wakened by the draught of this love and the voice of this calling!"[6] Or in regard to the stirrings of illumination and eventual union: "Pay attention to this work, therefore, and to its marvelous ways within your soul. When it has been truly conceived, it comes merely as a sudden stirring with no forewarning, instantly springing toward God as a spark from a coal."[7] And, "Bind yourself to Him, therefore, by love and by belief; and by virtue of the knot that

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[5] Aldous Huxley, The Perennial Philosophy (London, 1947), p. 1.

[6] The Cloud of Unknowing, trans. Ira Progoff (New York, 1961), p. 59.

[7] The Cloud, pp. 67-68.

binds you, you shall perceive together with Him and with all who are likewise bound to Him by love; . . . "[8] Certainly the themes are essentially the same, but even more striking is the kinship in metaphor: "the draught of love," "a spark from a coal," and "the knot that binds." And in regard to Taylor's relative passivity in the mystical experience, meditation upon meditation can be cited as similar in metaphor to The Cloud's "You be but the tree and let it be the caretaker. You be but the house, and let it be the squire dwelling within."[9]

I am not speaking of similarities among two or three writers only, however; the "perennial philosophy" and its attendant glory pervades the literary history of the eastern and western world. It should come as no surprise for Taylor's readers to hear echoes of St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), with whom Taylor was well acquainted as evidenced by his Augustinian library holdings. The convictions of St. Bonaventure (1221-1274 A.D.) regarding the sacraments as salve to the wounded soul and mystical steps as the means to the reception of the Bridegroom[10] suggest Taylor's beliefs and poetic efforts. The words of Meister Eckhart (1260-1327 A.D.) sound even more

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8 The Cloud, p. 67.
9 The Cloud, p. 141.
10 A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey, Mediaeval Mystical Tradition and Saint John of the Cross (London, 1954), pp. 61-62.

pompous (or is it not glorious?) than Taylor's when recounting his union with God: "The knower and the known are one. Simple people imagine that they should see God, as if He stood there and they here. This is not so. God and I, we are one in knowledge."[12] Like Taylor, he demands that these messengers give place! The Flemish mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293-1381 A.D.), argues in agreement with Taylor (see "The Experience," ll. 7-12) that "(In the Reality unitively known by the mystic), we can speak no more of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor of any creature, but only one Being, which is the very substance of the Divine Persons. There were we all one before our creation, for this is our super-essence. There the Godhead is in simple essence without activity."[13] St. John of the Cross (1542-1591 A. D.) places his religious poetry in an erotic context and speaks of the "fire that can consume yet do no harm" or an occasion in which "In the inner cellar / of my Beloved have I drunk . . . ."[14] Each description of the mystical experience demonstrates kinships with Taylor's, and

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[11]
[12] Quoted in Huxley, p. 19.
[13] Quoted in Huxley, p. 79.
[14] Quoted in Huxley, p. 40.
Quoted in Guillen, p. 113.

the same may be said of an almost unending list of mystical writers, for "The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds."[15]

Conclusion

What then are the conclusions to be drawn from the Preparatory Meditations? Certainly among them is the fact that Edward Taylor, in this body of poetry, is a poet of the Perennial Philosophy: he longs for and actively seeks the "transcendent Ground of all being." The word "preparatory" is key to his intention, suggestive of the need to make ready for an event of some moment; and though the Lord's Feast or Sacrament is the occasion for which he prepares, no aspect of his efforts is so central to the Meditations as an anticipated union with God in the observance of the wedding feast.

Mystical union, however, demands that proper preparatory steps be negotiated in the mind (scala perfectionis). It is this mental journey which informs and structures the poetry, properly classifying it as "an instrument of mystical

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[15] Huxley, p. 2.

effort, a prayer for help in the way to God, an act of worship in itself designed to bring the spirit nearer to its goal, to promote that assimilation of spirit that is the objective of the mystic."[16] Each poem in the series represents the mystical trek in its stages, from beginning to anticipated end or in fragmentation: from purgation through illumination to anticipated union or perhaps only in a moment of illumination on the mystic's way. When the complete journey is represented, Taylor moves from intense focus upon himself (self-denigration) to rhapsodic, hymn-like praise of Jesus, and finally the suggestion of union with God in the person of God's Son.

Because the feast is so integral a part of Taylor's view of union, dramatic settings suggest his participation (as the speaker of the poem) in sumptuous feasts, further ordering a large body of the Meditations. This organizing force is not to be seen as distinct from but rather a part of the scala perfectionis. Taylor can begin as an attendant to the feast, proclaiming the inappropriateness of his presence, and conclude, sounding almost as though only he is appropriately present. Or he can initiate a meditation descriptive of the unprepared and unworthy betrothed and conclude the scene

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[16] Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York: Collier Books, 1966), p. 27.

celebrative of his readiness to be joined to the Son of God as his bride. In either dramatic setting (and each has numerous variations on its primary theme), movement along the scale toward perfection is evident. And certainly the metaphors of union, so important to the conclusion of each meditation, suggest the overriding mystical concern; they so clearly participate in a traditional language that has managed to span continents and time.

Further evidence of Taylor's participation in the mystical continuum are his poetic claims regarding the ultimate experience. If one accepts his statements as born of genuine belief (and I know of no grounds on which to disallow them), then Taylor believed he had indeed once seen the Lord stand" 'Tween Heaven, and Earth where Heavens Bright glory all / In streams fell on thee, as a floodgate and, / Like Sun Beams through thee on the World to Fall" (Exper. ll. 26-28). And this occasion perhaps was multiplied many times over.

When one sees Taylor's Preparatory Meditations emerging from this mystical matrix, certain critical appraisals of Taylor's poetry are confirmed and/or elucidated and several questions surrounding this poetry answered. Professor Johnson's conclusions regarding Taylor's poetry (see pp. 2, 3 of this

work) take on more substance: reasons can be seen for Taylor's "moods of seraphic exaltation," amorous language converted to holy ends, "the prodigality of fanciful tropes," and the ecstatic abandonment of self to Christ. This is the way of the mystic. Even Johnson's suggestion that "On the whole, one's impression is that Taylor struck out for himself" now carries broader implications, for if mystical poetry is anything at all, it is artistic expression hewn out of an extraordinary and deeply personal philosophy (often running counter to prevailing social or religious thought). Taylor manages to fit his idea of union into orthodox theology largely, but the nature of the Meditations (i.e., private efforts toward mystical union) accounts perhaps for the impression that he "struck out for himself" literarily and even philosophically. Mystical poetry was not, after all, the order of Taylor's day and place; moral preachments (almost non-existent in the Meditations) were.

Mindele Black's observations regarding Taylor's Catholic-like spirituality and participation in a "disparate, sometimes dissonant [strain] in the Purital devotional tradition" (see p. 8 of this work) are elucidated when Taylor is seen against the backdrop of the Perennial Philosophy. The poetic spirituality is not narrowly Catholic, though numerous Catholic figures

have placed their stamps upon and heavily influenced western mysticism; it is broadly mystical as evidenced by the structure and language of Taylor's poetry, bridging even the enormous chasm between Catholicism and Puritanism. And certainly Taylor's role as a mystical poet begins to answer the several questions raised by Herbert Blau (see p. 6 of this work), for one would anticipate that the mystic might look for "signs of saving grace [or what I would prefer to call wholeness in the One] in his poetry," that he might write at times even "as if in a trance."

Taylor's mystical yearnings also account for poetry that focuses on a loving Christ rather than a militant Christ. As a St. John of the Cross, Taylor must shout

> Gocemonos, Amado,
> Y vamonos a ver en tu hermosura.
>
> Rejoice, my love, with me
> And in your beauty see us both reflected.[17]

Guillén argues that "These words [Gocemonos, Amado], which can just as correctly be translated 'Let us have joy of one another, Beloved,' are an audacious exclamation of a love completely fulfilled."[18] And it is precisely such love Taylor seeks in the Meditations; neither his philosophical nor his "dramatic"

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[17] Quoted in Guillén, p. 120.
[18] Guillén, p. 120.

intention allows for a master-at-arms. His is a Master in whose arms he wishes to be held, one whom he can "see, touch, and love" in the mystical love affair.

It is no wonder then that out of a world keenly conscious of the Fall emerges poetry celebrative of man. The Meditations are born not so much of a time or place as they are of a conviction that man possesses within him the potential to return to the Source of all beings. This conviction has no geographical or temporal boundaries and provides good reason to celebrate man's place in God's order of things: in a moment of mystical union, the Thomistic hierarchical system must lie in a state of suspension, allowing man to assume his extraordinary but paradoxically rightful place "in God." Only when he is forced by his own limitations back into the world of sensations is the "ordinary" Thomistic system revived, and a Taylor must begin the journey again from his former point of departure (purgation).

Audacious that Taylor, a colonial Puritan, should in Cavalier fashion shunt angelic beings to a position less favorable than his own? Not at all, but rather very predictable when given the mystical context: "Now the mystical consciousness, formed as it is under the moulding influence

of strong emotion, is characterized by an unusually high degree of certitude, or subjective assurance. There is a great practical advantage in this, if and in so far as that of which the mystic is subjectively assured happens to be objectively true. It fortifies the soul for steadfast endurance and persevering action, to be firmly convinced of the reality of a God whose will is identical with any morally idealistic action which one is proposing to undertake."[19] And because Taylor believes he has seen God before, he can return to meditation upon meditation in search of his God with a degree of assurance that He shall be experienced again and again.

It is this driving mystical philosophy, mixed with an exquisite delicacy, that gives rise to the uneven but uniquely beautiful Meditations. It accounts for the basic intention, structure, and metaphor of the series and places Taylor among the poets of the Perennial Philosophy. It cannot answer, however, many critical questions yet surrounding his monumental effort; and certainly as Taylor returned to his poetry repeatedly to find his God, future critics will return again and again to the Meditations to find their Edward Taylor.

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[19] Douglas Clyde Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge (New York, 1940), p. 31.

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